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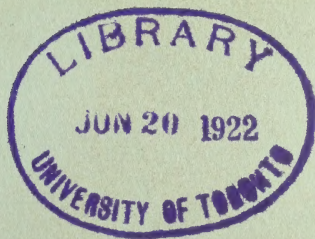
# PARLIAMENTARY FRANCHISE REFORM IN ENGLAND FROM 1885 TO 1918

BY

HOMER LAWRENCE MORRIS, A. M.

*Professor of Economics and Political Science  
in Earlham College*

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE  
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY




NEW YORK  
1921



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

THE history of the franchise reform bills in England during the nineteenth century represents in a fairly accurate way the struggle for democracy in that country. The basis of the state was gradually broadened by these franchise reforms to include within its political scope a larger part of the population. The disfranchised sections of the population in their struggle for political rights worked, as always, under a great handicap. Since they were without political power they had either to create a general sentiment for their cause which would compel the Government to grant concessions or to induce a political party to sponsor their cause. The party leaders recognized that any radical extension of the franchise was fraught with unknown political eventualities. It was for this reason that the three great electoral reforms in England during the nineteenth century were periods of such great national excitement and intense party antagonism. The political powers were so strongly entrenched, and their fear of the people was so great that only certain classes were admitted to political rights at each stage of the franchise reform.

The first fact to appreciate in connection with the English franchise system is that when the new extensions of the franchise were granted, the old system was not re-codified and all the old qualifications abolished, but new qualifications were simply added. As a result of this

process the old rights and qualifications extending back to feudal days continued to form a part of the franchise system.<sup>1</sup> This naturally resulted in anomalies and gross inconsistencies. The growth of democratic ideas made this antiquated system seem intolerable. A brief statement of the chief causes of grievance will serve to introduce the problem in its complicated aspects.

In England the right of franchise was never granted to a man as an individual, nor indeed was it so granted by the Act of 1918. It was, on the contrary, granted to the individual because of his ownership, occupation, residence, service, right as a lodger, or by virtue of being a graduate of some particular university. This system resulted in the practice of plural voting—that is, an elector could vote in every constituency in which he possessed the necessary qualifications. The exact number of these plural votes cannot be determined, but in 1910 there were, it was estimated, between 500,000 and 525,000. The character of the political controversy and the partisan spirit back of the demand for the abolition of plural voting was intensified by the fact that at least eighty per cent of the plural voters were affiliated with the Conservative party.<sup>2</sup> The abolition of this system became one of the cardinal demands of the Liberal party and gave zest to the agitations for other franchise reforms.

Another cause of grievance was the system of registration. The franchise laws in England were not as liberal as they might at first appear, for an elector was only a potential voter until his name was placed on the current register. In order to be placed upon the register all

<sup>1</sup> Anson, *Law and Custom of Constitution* (4th edition 1909, revised 1911), vol. i, pp. 101-123.

<sup>2</sup> Porritt, "Barriers against Democracy," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. xxvi, p. 8.

voters, except owners and freemen, must have been in occupation of the qualifying premises for one year preceding the fifteenth of July, and the register became effective the first of the following January.<sup>1</sup> Thus the law required twelve months continuous occupation in a constituency, and a minimum of eighteen months must elapse before an elector could actually vote. If an elector moved into a constituency shortly after the fifteenth of July it was almost thirty months before he became an actual voter in that constituency. This requirement resulted in the disfranchisement of a vast number of electors, especially among casual laborers and the great industrial population that moved frequently. This also had its partisan aspect because it affected the Liberal and Labor parties more adversely than the Conservative party and led to a demand to shorten the qualifying period, which in turn involved the whole question of the registration system.

The difference in the size of the electoral districts also resulted in great political inequalities. The redistribution of seats under the Act of 1885 was at best only a rough approximation to equal electoral districts. The industrial changes of the following years resulted in great shifts in population. Since there was no provision for periodic redistribution, gross inequalities developed which became a mockery to the principle of equal representation. In 1911 the constituency of Newry in Ireland, with a population of 12,841, and that of Romford in Essex, with a population of 312,804, each had a single representative in Parliament. The disproportion was twenty-four to one. The disparity with Durham, the smallest constituency in England, with a population

<sup>1</sup> Rogers, *On Elections*, vol. i, pp. 61-63, 125.



of 15,986, was almost as great. These inequalities led to an insistent demand for a redistribution of seats.

At the time of the Reform Bill of 1884 the demand for women's suffrage was of little more than academic interest, but the feminist movement developed rapidly. This struggle of women against prejudices, custom, and tradition, against entrenched political power and vested interests, and against the divisions within their own ranks, makes one of the most thrilling chapters in the fight for political rights. The task was the more difficult in England because it was a question that ran athwart party lines; neither of the two dominant parties was able to make a party issue of it. Even after a majority of the Liberals, as individuals, had expressed themselves in favor of the principle, they were never as a party willing to risk their political life upon the issue, because they were convinced that the popular demand for it was not deep-seated enough to require action. It was, therefore, only in the cataclysm of war that the women of England were able to convince the Government of their real strength and of their value to the state. It was under such conditions that the franchise was finally extended to them, England being the first of the Great Powers of Europe to enfranchise women.

It is the purpose of this study to trace since 1885 the history of the movement to eliminate these political inequalities, to abolish anomalies and to extend the scope of the franchise. Of these reforms only two aroused any very great interest, plural voting and the enfranchisement of women. They will accordingly occupy chief consideration, and special attention will be given to the parliamentary development of these reforms. The question of plural voting never attracted any very great attention outside political circles and never became a sub-

ject of popular interest, but it did cause a great deal of agitation in Parliament.

The question of women's suffrage, however, was one upon which the attention of the nation was finally focused. No attempt will be made to follow the entire development of the women's suffrage movement; it will be discussed only in so far as it is necessary to give the proper background for its parliamentary history. Although a multitude of bills were introduced into Parliament dealing with these matters, they were all defeated except the Representation of the People Bill of 1917, yet each one played a part in the crystalization of public sentiment. It was this persistent agitation and unceasing effort of the reform advocates that made possible the Act of 1918. The reforms will be traced separately except when the movements were merged in 1912 and again in 1917.

## CHAPTER II

### ATTEMPTS TO ABOLISH PLURAL VOTING BETWEEN 1885 AND 1909

THERE was very little discussion, either by the public or in Parliament, concerning the question of franchise or electoral reforms for several years after the passage of the Redistribution Act of 1885. This silence was broken in 1891 when a resolution was introduced<sup>1</sup> which provided that the laws relating to qualification and registration of parliamentary electors should be simplified.<sup>2</sup> But the Government showed no disposition to give any time for the discussion of the question so that with its first introduction the resolution was defeated. In the years immediately following, bills were introduced to abolish plural voting, to establish manhood suffrage, to reduce the qualifying period, and to hold all elections on the same day. These bills were invariably defeated and aroused little interest either in or out of Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

During the ascendancy of the Unionist party in the decade following their success at the polls in 1895 the question of franchise reform received little consideration. The Liberals were too weak and torn with dissensions to be able to make any formidable demands. Every time

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 3d series, vol. 351: 40-50.

<sup>2</sup> It provided that a person could not vote in more than one electoral division, and the time of qualification was reduced to three months.

<sup>3</sup> Bills were introduced in 1892, 1893, 1894 and 1895.



the party introduced any bill looking toward a reform of the franchise it was met with the statement from the Unionists that such a reform could be considered only in connection with the question of redistribution. "One man, one value" must be dealt with at the same time as "one man, one vote". But in spite of their great majority the Unionists showed little enthusiasm for the consummation of either reform. It fact it was not until the last session of the Unionist Parliament that the subject was even broached by the Government itself.

The activity of the Government, however, went no farther than the appointment of a Boundary Commission to study the question, and a promise by the Prime Minister that a bill dealing with the whole question of redistribution and electoral reform would be introduced the following year. The sudden resignation of Mr. Balfour in December, 1905, relieved him of the responsibility of fulfilling this obligation. Thus for two decades following the acts of the 80's very little interest was manifested in the question of franchise and electoral reforms.

### *General Election of 1906*

The election of 1906 marked an epoch in English political life. The Unionists had been losing in the recent by-elections, and the returns of the general election demonstrated that they had lost the confidence of the country. When Mr. Chamberlain in 1903 raised the question of the protective tariff, it served as nothing else had to divide the strength of the Unionists and to unite the divided ranks of the Liberals. The Liberal leaders were not slow to seize this opportunity to unite their own party and to appeal to the country squarely upon the question of free trade *versus* protection. This was the one issue which the Liberals constantly discussed

and they did not permit minor questions to confuse the voters. The results of the election fully justified their political sagacity.

A total of 6,555,301 votes were cast; of these 4,026,704 were cast for Liberal, Nationalist, and Labor candidates; only 2,528,597 for Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. As a result the Liberals and their allies had a clear majority of 354 members in the House of Commons, the party strength being 374 Liberals, 84 Nationalists, 54 Laborites, as against 131 Conservatives and 27 Liberal Unionists. Such an overwhelming victory placed the Government in a position to carry out its program, at least so far as the House of Commons was concerned. The dominant issue in the election did not require immediate legislative action by the Government since it had been really one of opposition to change. The Government was, therefore, free to carry out the other parts of the Liberal program which had been very largely in the background during the campaign. The Liberal victory meant the revival of the attempt to secure franchise reform, which was first directed towards the abolition of plural voting. For years this had been one of the cardinal demands of the party. The principle was annually reaffirmed at the meetings of the National Liberal Federation that no elector should have more than one vote. The campaign speeches indicated, however, that the question played no important part in the election, although it was mentioned in most of the election addresses and it was clearly stated as one of the demands of the party.

In his first formal address delivered at Albert Hall after he was appointed Prime Minister, Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, having spoken of the program for reform said: "Do not let us forget that for these purposes our

instrument—that is, the British Parliament—must be made effective and ready. We must as opportunities afford restore its impaired authority, develop its strength and by reforming its electoral methods, bring it into closer touch with the life of the people.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Plural Voting Bill of 1906*

In the speech from the Throne at the opening of the session the attention of Parliament was directed to the advisability of preventing plural voting in parliamentary elections.<sup>2</sup> On May 2, 1906, a bill embodying this recommendation was introduced for the Government by Mr. Harcourt, the First Commissioner of Works. It was a brief bill providing that a person registered as a parliamentary elector in more than one constituency could vote only in the one which he definitely selected as his voting place.<sup>3</sup> In selecting a voting constituency the elector would be required to send a notice of his selection to the clerk of the county council or town clerk who would be responsible for printing the parliamentary register. The name was to appear on the register in subsequent years so long as there was no interruption in qualifications and so long as the selection was not withdrawn. The law at that time prohibited an elector with qualifications in more than one division of a borough from voting in more than one division at a single election.<sup>4</sup> By the bill the Government proposed to extend this principle to the country as a whole, and to abolish plural voting between boroughs and counties as it already had been abolished between the divisions of a single borough.

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, December 22, 1905, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 152: 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Bills*, 1906, vol. iv, Bill 187.

<sup>4</sup> *Redistribution of Seats Act*, 1885 (48 & 49 Vict., c. 23), s. 8.

The greatest amount of discussion during the debates on the bill was concerned with the motives that inspired it. The Opposition maintained that it was introduced for political reasons to deprive the Conservatives of their votes. Thus *The Times* in an editorial comment on the introduction of the bill said, "Its introduction can only be regarded as another of the sops thrown, regardless of principle or coherence, by the present Government to the different sections of the heterogeneous coalition upon which it depends."<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*<sup>2</sup> opposed the bill very strongly because it dealt with the subject of "one man, one vote," while it left untouched the far greater evil of the unequal value of the vote. The two reforms, it maintained, should be dealt with at the same time.<sup>3</sup> *The Tribune*, a Liberal paper, did not attempt to conceal the party advantage which it believed would result from the passage of the bill.<sup>4</sup>

The bill came up for second reading on May 14. The Liberals opposed the system of plural voting as an anachronism, a survival of former privileges which ought to be abolished in favor of a more democratic system of voting. As pointed out by Mr. Harcourt, the system of plural voting gave the land holders an undue power in the determination of the policy of the Government, because their land qualified them to vote in different constituencies, while men who held personal and intangible property had but one vote.<sup>5</sup> It was to this overrepre-

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, May 3, 1906, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> While a Unionist paper, it supported the Liberals during the recent election on account of their opposition to the principle of the protective tariff.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*, May 5, 1906, p. 697.

<sup>4</sup> *The Tribune*, May 3, 1906, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 157: 234-41.



sentation of the landed classes that the Liberals had attributed a large number of their political defeats.

This discussion involved the question of the real basis of English representation. In setting forth the Liberal theory of representation Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman voiced the conviction of his party when he said, "I repudiate the idea that a man votes because of his property. I repudiate altogether that theory. If it is a theory which has tradition and historic weight behind it, then the sooner we pass this bill and get free from the idea the better, because in the future, whatever it may have been in the past, the voting power of this country must be in the voter himself because he is a qualified voter, and not on account of his property."<sup>1</sup> The plural voters did not lack staunch supporters to defend their cause from the standpoint of the principle of government. Mr. Forster stated the Conservative viewpoint when he said that property was at the basis of every vote in the country, and therefore the system of plural voting was in harmony with the English principle of franchise.<sup>2</sup> He contended that a man did not vote because he was a man, since such a policy would constitute manhood suffrage; he exercised the right because he was the owner of a freehold property of a minimum value, or was a lease holder or occupier. Plural voting, he argued, was in accord with the English principle of representation of property through the localities.

The Opposition attacked the bill also on the ground that it was piecemeal legislation—that instead of dealing with the whole problem it dealt simply with one of the electoral anomalies, the abolition of which was of

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 157: 298.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-14.

party advantage to the Liberals. As an evidence of this they cited the great disparity between the large and the small constituencies. The examples of Kilkenny and Newry with their small number of electors and Romford and Walthamston with their large electorates, were frequently mentioned during the debate. While the bill did not include redistribution, Sir Charles Dilke argued that its effect would be to reduce the disparities and to take a step toward "one vote, one value." This would be especially true, he maintained, between England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, because there were fewer plural voters in Wales and Scotland than in England and virtually none in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The Conservatives attempted to place the Government in the position of opposing redistribution. In answer to this charge Mr. Dobson pointed out that a majority of the members of the party in addressing their constituencies had pledged themselves in favor of a redistribution bill.<sup>2</sup> He contended, however, that such a reform should be the work of an old, not of a new Parliament. In spite of the protests of the Opposition the bill passed a second reading by the vote of 403 to 95.

The question of university representation caused more discussion during the committee stage than any other single amendment. Mr. Cave moved to amend the bill so that it would not apply to university constituencies.<sup>3</sup> He was ably supported in this by Mr. Balfour, who appeared as the chief champion of university representation. They both insisted that the question of the perpetuation of the system of university representation was brought directly before the House by the bill. University electors

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 157: 215-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 163: 201-4.

were granted the right of selection in the bill the same as any other elector, but the Opponents of the bill maintained that this was only an insidious method adopted by the Government which would ultimately lead to a demand for a complete abolition of the system since a university elector would probably select his place of residence as his voting constituency.

The policy of the Government was defended by Mr. Harcourt.<sup>1</sup> He denied any intention on the part of the Government of abolishing the system of university representation, the whole contention of the Government being that they were treating the university voter the same as other plural voters. Both in the House and in the press the division over the question was purely on party lines. The vote to exclude the university constituency from application in the bill failed by a vote of 92 to 326. Other attempts to save the university vote met the same fate.

According to the bill the plural voter, in order to get on the register the first time, had to make a definite selection; otherwise he could not vote at all. This principle was the cause of a great deal of discussion and numerous amendments were offered, some of them by the Opposition in their attempt to defeat the purposes of the bill and others by Liberals who believed that the bill, as framed, was unworkable. The plan urged most strongly was that the place of residence should be the voting constituency. This would obviate the necessity of making a selection except where an elector had more than one residence.<sup>2</sup> The Government, however, insisted that the principle of selection was an integral part of the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 163: 204-6.

<sup>2</sup> Amendments offered by Sir Charles Dilke, a friend of the Bill, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 163: 475, and by Mr. Austen Chamberlain, an opponent of the Bill, *ibid.*, 489.

bill and could not be changed. It was not, it said, too great a hardship to ask the plural voter to make a selection once in his lifetime. This, it pointed out, was no greater hardship than the requirement of the lodgers who had to register every year in order to have the right to vote.

During the whole course of the bill in the House of Commons the Government did not accept an amendment which altered in any way the principle of the measure, although several amendments were adopted which changed slightly the machinery of the bill. With these changes the bill passed a third reading on December 3, 1906, by the vote of 333 to 104.

The bill was read a first time the next day in the House of Lords and came up for the second reading on December 10. No new arguments were presented by the Lords that had not been considered by the Commons. The discussion attracted little attention and the time devoted to the bill occupied less than one sitting. It was a foregone conclusion that the Lords would defeat the measure. On the motion for a second reading the bill was defeated by the vote of 43 to 143.<sup>1</sup>

The debates indicate a rather clear-cut issue between the parties. The Liberals demanded the abolition of plural voting as inconsistent with the principle of democracy. They insisted that the individual elector rather than property was the basis of representation. At the same time they recognized the party advantage that would come to them from the abolition of plural voting. The fact that in many constituencies during the past two decades these very members of Parliament had been defeated, largely, as they believed, by the ballots of non-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 166: 1518.



resident voters, naturally lent zest to the demand for reform. The Conservatives, being largely representatives of the landed and propertied classes, looked upon the franchise as the guardian of the interests of property and viewed with alarm the democratic demand of "one man, one vote." They met this with the slogan, "one vote, one value." During their term of office, however, they had shown no enthusiasm for such a reform except in so far as it applied to a reduction of the Irish representation. They never advocated redistribution in connection with the great industrial centers in England. They had their eyes fixed upon the immediate political effects just as the Liberals had. Having so recently suffered an overwhelming defeat they were going to resist with all possible means any inroads upon their ancient privileges.

Two days after the Lords defeated the Plural Voting Bill the House of Commons rejected *en bloc* the proposed amendments to the Educational Bill which had been made by the Lords. These events brought into the very center of political discussion the whole question of the constitutional status and the power of the House of Lords. The Liberals maintained that since the Government had to administer the laws, it must also have control of making the laws. They insisted that the Government could not be constantly hampered by an irresponsible body of men who had nothing to do with the administrative work of the government. The Liberals were not slow to make this one of their chief party issues. At the meeting of The National Liberal Federation held at Plymouth in 1907 a resolution was carried unanimously which condemned the House of Lords for the flagrant misuse of its power.<sup>1</sup> At this same meeting Sir Henry

<sup>1</sup>*Proceedings of National Liberal Federation, 1907, p. 56.*

Campbell-Bannerman pledged his party to carry this matter to a serious and decisive test and served notice to that effect on the Lords.<sup>1</sup> One pamphleteer pointed out that for thirty-eight years the Lords had not defeated a bill which had been passed and supported by the Conservative party. But during that time they had rejected, defeated, or mutilated twenty-six bills supported by the Liberals, eight of these during the years 1906 and 1907.<sup>2</sup>

With the menacing attitude of the Lords the Liberals realized more fully the necessity of abolishing the system of plural voting in order that the House of Commons might more accurately reflect the political views of the electorate which they believed would strengthen their position. They recognized, however, that it would be practically impossible to pass a general reform bill until some changes were made in the House of Lords.

### *Election and Registration Bill (London) 1908*

The next attempt to abolish plural voting was made in 1908. This was not a general bill as was the one of 1906, but applied only to London and dealt with election and registration. Its chief purpose was the abolition of plural voting. The bill was introduced by Mr. Dickinson and although a private members' bill it was permitted to come up for a second reading.<sup>3</sup> As pointed out by Mr. Dickinson, London was in a different position from any other city in regard to parliamentary elections. The city was divided into twenty-eight parliamentary boroughs instead of being a single parliamentary borough as was the case in other cities. Each of these twenty-eight boroughs was sub-divided into electoral

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of National Liberal Federation*, 1907, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Liberal Publications*, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 183: 1233-41.

divisions as was true in other cities. This system in London gave rise to two anomalies. In the first place, it caused a large number of electors to lose their votes because of the twelve months' residence qualification in each borough. Mr. Dickinson estimated that in his own constituency in 1907 there were 300 electors who moved to other parliamentary boroughs in London. If this were typical of other boroughs it would mean that there were from 25,000 to 30,000 electors who lost their votes because they moved from one part of the city to another. The second anomaly resulted in a multiplication of the number of plural voters. If a man had business interests and possessed qualifications in each borough he would have as many votes. It was estimated that of the 600,000 electors in London some 60,000 had duplicate votes elsewhere, and at least 36,000 of these had duplicate qualifications in the City of London. It was to remedy these anomalies that the bill was introduced. It provided that the county of London should comprise one parliamentary borough and that the parliamentary boroughs which existed at the time of the passage of the act should become divisions of the parliamentary borough.<sup>1</sup>

The bill was opposed on the familiar lines that it was piecemeal legislation and would touch only one evil. The arguments for and against plural voting played an important part in the discussion. At the close of the day's sitting Mr. Dickinson moved that the bill be read a second time, but the Speaker refused to put the question and it never came to a vote. The supporters of the bill claimed that it would have removed the glaring anomalies in relation to London, and would have placed

<sup>1</sup> *Public Bills*, 1908, vol. ii, p. 341.

it on an equal basis with other cities. If the bill had come to a vote it is doubtful whether it would have passed, for the Government refused to sponsor the measure. It is practically certain that it would not have passed the House of Lords.

### *London Election Bill of 1909*

The following year Mr. Harcourt introduced for the Government a London Election Bill which was somewhat less pretentious than that of 1908. This bill did not provide any new machinery for its operation; it simply applied the existing law to London. An elector having more than one qualification should notify the revising barrister of the selection of his voting place. In case one of his qualifications was his place of abode that would constitute his election division. Nonresident freemen, who had no place of abode within the parliamentary borough, would be assigned an election division by the revising barrister, the assignments to be distributed equally among the divisions.<sup>1</sup> In this respect the bill made one concession to the borough of the City of London which was the center of the banking, trading, and commercial interests. It provided that non resident freemen and liverymen of the City of London would be entitled to register in that division and could not be assigned to any other division as would be the case in the other boroughs of the city.<sup>2</sup>

While the bill applied only to London the whole argument centered upon the general question of plural voting. The Government insisted that because of the division of London into parliamentary boroughs it was placed

<sup>1</sup> *Redistribution of Seats Act*, 1885 (48 & 49 Vict., c. 23), s. 14. (*Parliamentary Papers—London Election Bill*, 1909, vol. 70, Bill 133).

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1909, vol. iii, Bill 155.



in a different position from any other city and that the proposed bill would remedy this injustice. It was repeatedly asserted during the debate that the Government was attempting to secure by piecemeal legislation what it had failed to obtain by the general bill of 1906. On a final vote before the question was put for a third reading the bill carried by 161 to 29. Of the 29 London members who voted, 24 voted for the bill.

The next day the bill was read for the first time in the House of Lords and came up for a second reading on November 8. The arguments took about the same course as in the Commons. It was generally conceded that the bill was supported and opposed for party reasons.<sup>1</sup> It was a foregone conclusion that it would be defeated by the Lords. They lived up to expectation and it was given the "three months hoist".

Thus the Liberals had been unable to realize the high hopes that they entertained after their victory in 1906. The House of Lords had blocked the efforts of the party to abolish plural voting. This served only to convince the Liberal leaders that the House of Lords was the stronghold of privilege. They decided that Liberal legislation could be passed only by reconstituting the House of Lords or placing limitations on its power. The next two years were so taken up with these constitutional questions that there was no discussion upon any bill dealing with plural voting. It was not until the introduction of the Franchise and Registration Bill of 1912 that the Government again turned its attention toward this question.

<sup>1</sup> *Liberal Magazine*, 1909, vol. xvii, pp. 698-9. *The Times*, October 19, 1909, p. 9.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EARLY MOVEMENT FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

THE great struggle for women's suffrage in England was to gain the parliamentary franchise; the right of municipal or borough franchise was granted in 1869 without any bitter opposition.<sup>1</sup> The Reform Act of 1832 definitely prevented women from exercising the right of the parliamentary franchise by the introduction of the word "male" before the word "person." The first serious parliamentary debate on national women's suffrage occurred when John Stuart Mill offered his amendment to the Bill of 1867 to omit the word "man" and substitute the word "person" in the enfranchising clause.<sup>2</sup> Although he supported this amendment by a speech which deeply impressed the House, it was defeated by a vote of 73 to 196. The women, nevertheless attempted to exercise the right to vote under the act as passed. They claimed that the Reform Bill as interpreted by Lord Brougham's Act of 1850 conferred

<sup>1</sup> The Municipal Corporation Act of 1835 introduced the word "male" before the word "person," thereby depriving women of the right to vote, which at that time they were entitled to exercise, if otherwise qualified. Through the effort of Mr. Jacob Bright the Municipal Corporation Act of 1869 restored the municipal franchise to women. This act was repealed and reenacted by the Municipal Corporation Act of 1882. This together with subsequent acts granted women the right of both borough and county franchise on the same basis as men. Marriage, however, continued to constitute a total disqualification. (Rogers, *On Elections*, vol. i, pp. 187, 179, 67-8).

<sup>2</sup> Hansard (*Parliamentary Debates*) 3d series, vol. 284: 996; Murdoch, *Constitutional Reform*, p. 250; Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales*, p. 476.

the franchise upon women. This Act declared, "That in all Acts words importing the masculine gender shall be deemed and taken to include females, . . . unless the contrary as to gender . . . is expressly provided."<sup>1</sup> In order to test their rights under this Act, a large number of women attempted to get their names placed on the register of voters. Their claims were rejected by the revising barrister. The most famous case, that of *Chorlton v. Lings*, was argued before the Court of Common Pleas in 1868. The court ruled that although the word "man" must be held to include women when the observance of laws, taxation, and duties were concerned, it included only male persons when applied to the franchise.<sup>2</sup> After this decision the women could hope to secure the franchise only by act of Parliament.

The early movement for the franchise reached its height in 1884 when the Reform Bill was before Parliament.<sup>3</sup> This bill was to extend the franchise to about 2,000,000 additional men. On June 12 Mr. Woodall moved an amendment to include women, within the scope of the bill, where the right of voting for the members of Parliament was concerned. This was vigorously opposed by Mr. Gladstone on behalf of the Government who said that, "the vessel carried as big a cargo as it could safely carry." The amendment was rejected by a majority of 136 with over a hundred of the supposed friends of women's suffrage voting against the amendment because of pressure from the Government.<sup>4</sup>

The so-called friends of women's suffrage were in the

<sup>1</sup> 13 & 14 *Vict.*, c. 21, s. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *L. R. 4 C. P.* 374.

<sup>3</sup> The first bill on women's suffrage was introduced by Mr. Jacob Bright in 1870. It carried on the second reading by vote of 124 to 91. In the committee it was opposed by Mr. Gladstone and defeated.

<sup>4</sup> *Hansard (Parliamentary Debates)* 3rd series, vol. 289: 1942-64; vol. 299: 92-204; Murdoch, *op. cit.*, p. 283; Seymour, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

majority in the House of Commons, and this was in consequence a great setback for the cause. It was almost twenty years before the question came again prominently before the country. A few staunch supporters, however, continued the agitation, and not a year passed without the presentation of either a bill or resolution on the subject. It was during these years that a program of education was carried on by the supporters of women's suffrage in an undemonstrative way which laid the foundation for far greater advancement in later years. Women also began to take a more active part in political affairs, which developed their political sagacity and their knowledge of politics as practiced by the dominant parties. They gained invaluable political experiences in the Primrose League and in the Women's Liberal Federation. These organizations were not primarily for the advancement of women's suffrage, but in many instances they were used as partisan auxiliary organizations to the Conservative and Liberal parties.

In 1897 a decisive forward step was taken in the organization of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. The National Union was formed by the amalgamation of some sixteen women's suffrage societies and its sole purpose was to work for women's suffrage on a nonpartisan basis. It was the policy of the organization to place the question "in such a position that no Government of whatever party [would] be able to touch questions relating to representation, without at the same time removing the electoral disabilities of women."<sup>1</sup> This union became the great constructive force of the nonmilitant suffrage workers.

There had been a growing feeling for several years among the more aggressive of the women's suffrage workers that nothing practical could be gained through the con-

<sup>1</sup> Metcalfe, *Woman's Effort*, p. 17.



tinuation of their work in connection with the two dominant political parties. A great many of them had become identified with the Independent Labor Party largely because this party admitted women to membership on equal terms with men. These recruits were mainly from the middle and labor classes.

The Women's Social and Political Union, the organization which was destined to play such a conspicuous part in the fight for women's suffrage, was formed on October 10, 1903. It was revolutionary in its inception and methods. Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, had been for years enthusiastic workers for the cause of women's suffrage. They had become convinced that a more progressive and radical program must be adopted if women were ever to gain their political rights. The organization was effected at the home of Mrs. Pankhurst in Manchester. Almost all the women at the first meeting were working women, although it was determined as a definite policy that the Union should be independent of both class and party. The program of action called for vigorous political methods, and not simply for the use of passive propaganda.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose and character of the organization have been clearly described by Mrs. Pankhurst herself. She states: "There was little formality about joining the Union. Any woman could become a member by paying a shilling, but at the same time she was required to sign a declaration of loyal adherence to our policy and a pledge not to work for any political party until the women's vote was won. . . . Moreover, if at any time a member or a group of members, loses faith in our policy; if any one begins to suggest that any other policy ought to be substituted, or if she tries to confuse the issue by adding other policies, she ceases at once to

<sup>1</sup> Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, p. 38.

be a member. . . We do not believe in the effectiveness of the ordinary suffrage organization. The Women's Social and Political Union is not hampered by a complexity of rules. We have no constitution and by-laws; nothing to be amended or tinkered with or quarrelled over at an annual meeting. In fact, we have no annual meeting, no business sessions, no election of officers. The Women's Social and Political Union is simply a suffrage army in the field. It is purely a volunteer army and no one is obliged to remain in it. Indeed we don't want anybody to remain in it who does not ardently believe in the policy of the army. The foundation of our policy is opposition to a Government which refuses votes to women. To support by word or deed a Government hostile to women's suffrage is simply to invite them to go on being hostile." <sup>1</sup>

#### *Slack's Women's Suffrage Bill of 1905*

The first work of propaganda and organization was among the women workers of Lancashire and Yorkshire. The organization grew in strength so rapidly that at the Annual Conference of the Independent Labor Party in 1904 the Administrative Council was directed to prepare a bill for the enfranchisement of women, to be introduced into Parliament the following session.<sup>2</sup> To get a friend of women's suffrage to introduce the bill was a rather difficult task, but finally Mr. Bamford Slack, who held the fourteenth place in the ballot, was induced to sponsor the measure. The bill was accordingly scheduled as the second order of the day for Friday, May 12, 1905. The women's suffrage workers were undaunted in their efforts to bring pressure upon their friends to support the measure. They induced a large delegation of women to attend the debate

<sup>1</sup> Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>2</sup> Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, pp. 7-10.

to give support and weight to their cause, for it had been eight years since there had been a women's suffrage bill introduced in the Commons.

The opponents of the bill resorted to familiar parliamentary tactics in order to prevent full consideration of the question. The first order of the afternoon session was an unimportant measure which required carts to carry tail lights at night. The debate on this bill began at 12 o'clock and lasted until 4:30 P. M., being purposely drawn out in order to defeat the women's suffrage bill. This left only thirty minutes for the consideration of Mr. Slack's measure. The bill provided merely that women should exercise the right of franchise on the same basis as men under the existing law.<sup>1</sup> He summarized the arguments for women's suffrage by saying that, "their claim was based on the eternal principles of liberty, equality, equity, and justice, and also of national morality and righteousness—principles to which this House could not for long consent to turn a deaf ear."<sup>2</sup> The necessity of the franchise to protect the economic interests of women was strongly emphasized by the supporters of the bill.

The chief argument advanced against women's suffrage was that the state was ultimately based upon force and that the duty of citizenship implied the ability to protect the state in the capacity of soldiers and policemen. The bill was opposed on the ground also that it would be intolerable for the state to be dominated by women, as would be the case because they outnumbered the men.

At the close of the debate the Speaker declined to put the question and the sitting adjourned without a vote. The bill came up for discussion again late in the afternoon on June 23, and was debated for a short time, but the Speaker

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1905, vol. v, Bill 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 146: 221.

again refused to put the question and no vote was taken. By these parliamentary manoeuvres the bill was prevented from ever coming to a vote.

The women who had witnessed the debate from behind the Grille in the ladies' gallery became exasperated at the dilatory tactics which had been used and the insulting way in which they had been treated by their opponents. On the suggestion of Mrs. Pankhurst they hurried outside to hold a meeting of protest against their treatment by the Government. Mrs. Wolstenholm-Elmy, the oldest worker in the cause of women's suffrage, began to address the women who crowded around her. Almost immediately the police interfered, broke up the meeting, and ordered them to disperse. Finally they were granted the privilege of holding a meeting at the Broad Sanctuary near the gates of Westminster Abbey. Here a resolution was adopted condemning the procedure of the House of Commons which made it possible for a small minority to prevent a vote from being taken upon the Enfranchisement Bill and calling upon the Government to enact the bill into law. This was the first aggressive act of the Women's Social and Political Union,<sup>1</sup> but it was only the beginning of a desperate struggle for political rights by a great body of citizens. Until this time the question of women's suffrage played no important part in politics and was given no space in the public press.

### *The Beginning of the Militant Movement*

During the summer of 1905 two incidents occurred which made a profound impression upon the leaders of the Union. The Government was in a very weak position owing to dissension in the Cabinet over the tariff reforms advocated by Mr. Chamberlain. There was also the criticism of the policy of the Government in conducting the South African

<sup>1</sup>Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, p. 43.



War. A general business depression prevailed, especially in the cotton trade, which resulted in distress in many industrial centers. From these districts came the demand that the Government take some steps to cope with unemployment and to relieve the distress of the starving workingmen. The bill introduced by Mr. Walter Long, on behalf of the Government, to deal with this matter had been so strongly opposed by members of the Conservative party that it was finally announced that no further time could be given to it. In the midst of this discussion Mr. Balfour announced that a crisis had arisen in the controversy between the Scottish Free Church and the United Free Church of Scotland. The Scottish Churches Bill was introduced to settle this dispute, and hurried through its various stages in spite of the limited time.

The leaders who had been attempting to get the unemployment bill passed proceeded at once to create a crisis that would compel the Government to rush their bill through. At a demonstration in Manchester the marchers came in conflict with the police and held their protest meeting in spite of police orders. The seriousness of this was called to the attention of the Government and the Unemployed Workman's Bill, which the Government had set aside for lack of time, was taken up and hurried through the remaining stages.

The leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union took their cue from these events and determined to set about to create a crisis which would compel the Government to grant suffrage to women.<sup>1</sup> After about forty years of peaceful agitation the more aggressive women came to the conclusion that it was useless to expect anything but verbal sympathy from the leaders of the great political parties.

<sup>1</sup> Pankhurst, *Suffragette*, p. 18.

Neither party would sponsor their cause as had been done in other reform movements. The press gave them no real support. They, therefore, ceased to ask the vote as a favor and began to demand it as a right. The new spirit manifested itself in the form of interruption of meetings and in the holding of protest meetings. This was a mild form of militancy.

The campaign and election of 1906 offered an excellent opportunity for the women to press their claims upon the leaders of the parties. It is a custom in English political meetings for persons in the audience to interrupt the speaker and ask questions. The leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union began to avail themselves of this privilege. The Liberal campaign was launched by Sir Edward Grey at Manchester on October 13. Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney attended this meeting to secure the pledge of the Liberal party for women's suffrage. They asked the speaker if the party would grant women's suffrage. Being ignored they repeatedly pressed their question.

The audience finally became exasperated by these interruptions and the women were seized by the police and ejected from the hall amid the shouts and cheers of the onlookers. They decided immediately to hold an indignation meeting. They had been speaking only a few minutes when they were arrested by the police and taken to the Town Hall. Both were charged with obstruction and with assaulting the police. The next morning they were brought before the police court and both were found guilty. Miss Pankhurst was ordered to pay a fine of ten shillings or to go to prison for seven days, and Miss Kenney five shilling or three days' imprisonment. They both refused to pay their fines and were hurried off to prison. This episode marks the beginning of the real militant movement and the long list of imprisonments for the cause of women's suffrage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pankhurst, *Suffragette*, pp. 24-37.

During the autumn and winter of 1906-07 the members of the Women's Social and Political Union conducted a carefully planned campaign of questioning the Liberal speakers at all important meetings. The display of the white banner with the inscription "Votes for Women" was expected at every important meeting. *The Times* in commenting upon the meeting of Mr. Asquith at Queen's Hall on December 19, 1905, said that the meeting was "disturbed only by the now inevitable lady interrupter." In spite of their efforts they were unable to secure the pledges of the leaders of the party to support their cause. The National Union worked in a more quiet and nonspectacular way during the election and attempted to secure the personal pledge of the candidates for support. In all, about five hundred candidates expressed their belief in some form of women's suffrage.<sup>1</sup>

The election, as has been stated, resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Liberal forces. But as subsequent events testified this did not apparently improve the chances for women's suffrage because the Government refused to make it a part of its program. It had not yet become a political question of sufficient importance to be so considered.

As soon as the election was over the Women's Social and Political Union began to lay extensive plans to place their demands before the new Government. The first step taken was an attempt to arouse the women of London, the initial appeal being made to the working class. The idea was conceived of a big demonstration in the form of a parade on the day of the opening of Parliament, February 19, 1906. A procession was accordingly organized, and they marched to Caxton Hall, Westminster, for a public meeting. In the midst of the meeting it was reported that the King's

<sup>1</sup> Metcalfe, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

speech contained no reference to the question of women's suffrage. At once a resolution was proposed condemning the omission and demanding that the Government immediately introduce a measure giving parliamentary votes to women on the same terms as to men. The resolution was carried by acclamation. The meeting adjourned and proceeded en masse to the Strangers' entrance of the House to plead with their friends to bestir themselves in behalf of the women's cause. The Government, having taken due precaution, had ordered the doors closed; they were permitted only to send separate deputations of twenty to interview members.<sup>1</sup> But they received no assurance that Parliament intended to grant the vote to women.

This first procession to Parliament was apparently barren of results; the women were disappointed and bewildered. They did not seem to realize at that time the tremendous prejudice and lethargy which prevailed against their movement on the part of the public. They did not appreciate that the Government seldom acts in such matters except in response to great popular demand. Their tasks were first to convert the great mass of people and then to bring pressure on the Government for action.

During this session the question of women's suffrage was debated briefly on two different occasions, the first time when a bill was introduced<sup>2</sup> by Sir Charles Dilke and later when a resolution was presented<sup>3</sup> by Mr. Keir Hardie. In each case only a short time was allotted for the debate and the Speaker refused to put the question to a vote.

In the meantime repeated attempts had been made by

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 20, 1906, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 152: 1448-50; *Parliamentary Papers*, 1906, vol. ii, Bill 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 155: 1570-2.



deputations to see Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, but he had refused to receive them. A memorial signed by nearly two hundred members of Parliament had been presented to him asking that he receive a deputation of members of Parliament on the subject of women's suffrage. Finally he agreed to receive a deputation on May 19. Plans were accordingly made for a huge demonstration including all parties, societies, and organizations which supported women's suffrage. The deputation included three hundred and fifty persons representing about twenty-five organizations.<sup>1</sup> The deputation was introduced by Sir Charles McLaren.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the speeches made by representatives of such a large proportion of the women's interest of the country, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman said that women had already demonstrated their ability along many political lines in connection with school boards, work on royal commissions, and departmental commissions. He admitted that in his opinion, they had made before the country "a conclusive and irrefutable argument." In speaking for the Government he said that he had only one thing to preach to them and that was the virtue of patience. He went on to explain that the Cabinet was divided upon the question, as the Cabinet of previous Governments had been, and that it would be impossible for him under the circumstances to

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, May 21, 1906, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Among the other speakers was Miss Emily Davies, who had submitted to John Stuart Mill the first petition for women's suffrage ever presented to Parliament. Mrs. Eva McLaren, Miss Margaret Ashton, and Mrs. Rolland Rainy represented respectively some 80,000, 99,000 and 14,000 women Liberals in England and Scotland. Mrs. Glasson represented 425 branches consisting of 22,000 members of the Women's Coöperative Guild. Mrs. Watson represented the Scottish Christian Union of the British Women's Temperance Association with a membership of 52,000 and Mrs. Mary Bateson presented a petition for the franchise signed by 1,530 women graduates.

make any pledge for the Government to carry out their demands. He suggested, however, that if they used moderation the growing interest of the country in their demands insured its success at no distant future. Such a pronouncement was a great disappointment to the members of the deputation; they wanted support from the Government.

In the afternoon the deputation held a meeting in Exeter Hall. A resolution was adopted which urged women to increase their efforts to convince the Government of the justice of their cause and it requested the Prime Minister to grant a day during the session for the discussion of a motion on the subject. A mass meeting was also held in the afternoon in Trafalgar Square which was attended by about 7,000 people, and vigorous protests were voiced against the Government because of its policy.

The Prime Minister had given as his reason for the refusal to make a women's suffrage bill a Government measure that certain members of the Cabinet were opposed to it. The supporters, therefore, began to direct their energies toward the conversion of these recalcitrant members. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George were particularly singled out. They repeatedly refused to receive deputations. The women were not to be thwarted in their efforts and began to use more vigorous methods which often resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of the demonstrators.

With the use of these militant tactics a cleavage began to develop among the suffrage workers. Those who adopted the militant methods were known as Suffragettes, while those who continued to use constitutional methods were known as Suffragists. The Suffragists, maintaining that it was a very small number of women who were bringing discredit upon the whole suffrage movement, depreciated and apologized for these militant acts. The militants, however, accomplished at least one thing. They brought their cause

before the public, and hardly a paper appeared that did not contain an account of a suffrage meeting or an open letter on some phase of the suffrage question. That the militants appreciated the seriousness of the task which they had undertaken was shown by a letter of Mrs. Pethick Lawrence in which she declared that a life and death struggle between the women and the Government had begun. She emphasized the fact that there was no turning back until the Government granted concessions. The old constitutional methods had failed to bring results and they had determined to try new methods.<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 1906 there were an increasing number of interruptions of public meetings; there were also parades and demonstrations, all of which tended to bring the question more prominently before the public. At the reopening of Parliament another attempt was made to obtain a promise from the Prime Minister that the Government would introduce a women's suffrage bill during the session. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman refused to receive the deputation. A meeting of protest followed in the Central Hall. The women were soon ejected and a second attempt was made in the Old Palace Yard. This was also broken up and resulted in the arrest of ten of the leaders who were later sentenced to two months' imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> The imprisonment of the suffrage leaders and their treatment as regular criminals, rather than as political prisoners, caused a great deal of discussion in the House of Commons, since friends of the movement addressed questions to the Government concerning their treatment and care. This was a subject of constant agitation and a source of frequent embarrassment to the Government.

<sup>1</sup> *Evening News*, June 25, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, October 24, 1906, p. 11.

On February 8, 1907, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, composed of thirty societies, was re-organized to carry on a more vigorous educational and propagandist campaign along nonmilitant lines. The next day they held a big demonstration in Hyde Park and between 3,000 and 4,000 women marched in the parade in spite of rain. The suffrage supporters had by this time definitely decided that they would on every possible occasion demonstrate to the Government the popular support of their cause and convince it of their determined purpose to obtain the franchise.

*Dickinson's Women's Enfranchisement bill of 1907*

In the ballot for place for introducing private members' bills, Mr. Dickinson secured the first place and agreed to introduce a women's suffrage measure.<sup>1</sup> It came up for a second reading on March 8. A great deal of care had been taken by those interested in women's suffrage that the bill should be of a conservative nature so that it would encounter as little opposition as possible. It introduced, therefore, no new qualifications for the franchise; it simply provided that in all acts relating to the qualifications and registration of voters where words which import the masculine gender were used, the same should be held to include women. In all purposes connected with the right of registration or voting it further stated that women could not be disqualified on account of marriage.<sup>2</sup> The number of women who would be enfranchised by this bill and the classes they would represent gave rise to considerable discussion. It was estimated that it would include between one and two million women. The real supporters of women's suffrage had investigated this question thoroughly and believed that it

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1907, vol. iv, Bill 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 170: 1102-9.



would include a larger percentage of women of the working class than of any other class.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Dickinson maintained that the chief purpose of the bill was to adopt the principle that neither sex nor marriage should be a disqualification from the right to vote. He urged that it was especially necessary that the women have the right of franchise in order to protect and advance their economic interests which were a great financial and political asset to the nation. Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, speaking early in the debate, said that the question was one on which there was no pretense of unanimity or consensus of opinion in the Cabinet and under the circumstances it was for the House to take its own course as decided by the individual views of its members; the Government would not interfere. Speaking personally he indicated his intention of voting for the bill although he objected to this particular measure on the ground that it was too limited in its scope.

The rejection of the bill was moved by Mr. Whitehead. He based his opposition chiefly on the ground that as framed it would enfranchise the middle and upper classes and was, therefore, undemocratic. This argument was advanced by most of the members who spoke against the bill. It was evident, however, that they were not concerned so much with the scope of the bill as they were opposed to women's suffrage under any condition; they used this democratic argument to conceal their real attitude toward the question. Before the close of the debate it became apparent that those in opposition would prevent a vote if pos-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dickinson pointed out that in 1904 in his constituency there were 1,014 women electors. Of these 3 per cent had belonged to the wealthy class, 37 per cent to the middle class and 60 per cent to the working class. The census taken by the Independent Labor Party in 1904 had shown that 82 per cent of the women on the Municipal Register belonged to the working class and the investigations made in connection with drafting this bill substantiated these general conclusions.

sible. Mr. Dickinson arose three times before five o'clock and attempted to put the question but the Speaker refused. Amid cries of "Divide," the debate was adjourned without taking a vote; the bill was talked to death.

A few days later a deputation of Liberals consisting of Sir Charles McLaren, Mr. Dickinson, Mr. Howard, Mr. Lennant, and Mr. Snowden called upon the Prime Minister, and attempted to get the Government to grant facilities for the bill. This the Prime Minister said would be an unprecedented procedure for a private members' bill at this stage. Since the Government refused to grant concessions the supporters decided to concentrate their attention and efforts on a resolution dealing with women's suffrage to be introduced by Sir Charles McLaren. Mr. Dickinson consented to withdraw his bill in order to clear the way for discussion of this resolution.

Sir Charles McLaren accordingly gave notice that on March 27, he would introduce a resolution for the enfranchisement of women. Subsequently Mr. Maurice Levy gave notice of his intention of introducing on March 26, a bill to confer the franchise on adult men and women. There was a rule of the House that a resolution could not be introduced when there was a bill before the House covering the same subject.<sup>1</sup> The Speaker requested that the bill be withdrawn to permit the discussion of the resolution. Mr. Levy refused to acquiesce in this. The Speaker held that while he believed that such a procedure would be an abuse of the privilege yet it could not be prohibited. The resolution was thus effectually "blocked" by a dummy bill. To the supporters of women's suffrage this was only another of the tricks of the opponents to use the machinery of the House to prevent discussion of the question.<sup>2</sup> Two other

<sup>1</sup> This rule was changed in 1914.

<sup>2</sup> In the meantime on March 20, another deputation had attempted to

bills to grant women's suffrage were introduced during 1907 by Sir Charles Dilke, but neither of them ever came up for discussion.<sup>1</sup>

In order to impress upon the Government the fact that women's suffrage was a live political issue the supporters adopted a consistent policy of fighting the by-elections. The Women's Social and Political Union opposed all Liberal candidates regardless of their attitude towards women's suffrage while the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies adopted the nonpartisan policy of supporting those candidates who would sponsor their cause. In such cases it is always difficult to determine definitely the causes of the election results; but it is a matter of fact that in most of the constituencies where fights were made there was a distinct falling off in the Liberal vote. The loss at Cocker-mouth was 1,446; at Huddersfield 540; in Northwest Derbyshire 1,021; South Aberdeen 3,001; Hexham 231; Stepney 503; at Rutland 202; Jarrow 4,573; Colne Valley 2,204; Northwest Staffordshire 271; Bury St. Edmunds 306, making a total loss to the Government at by-elections of 13,300 votes.<sup>2</sup> While only a part of this loss may be attributed to the opposition of the suffrage forces, the campaigns did

reach the House of Commons. They encountered the opposition of the police, a struggle resulted, arrests were made, and the next day sixty-seven persons were sentenced to prison.

<sup>1</sup>One concession, however, was made to women in 1907 which had to do with local qualifications. An act was passed which provided that women could not be disqualified by reason of sex or marriage from being elected or being a councillor or alderman of the council of any county or borough, but it provided that a woman could not be elected as chairman of the county council or mayor of a borough. (*Parliamentary Papers*, 1907, vol. iv, Bill 297). This repealed the part of the Act of 1899 which provided that women were not eligible for these offices. They had had the right to vote for such offices but not to hold them.

<sup>2</sup> Pankhurst, *Suffragette*, p. 166.

serve to bring the question before the electorate more prominently and gave the women valuable electioneering experience.<sup>1</sup>

*Stanger's Women's Enfranchisement Bill of 1908*

The suffrage forces were fortunate again in 1908 in securing a good place for a private members' bill. Mr. Stanger introduced his bill for the enfranchisement of women on February 3, and it came up for a second reading on February 28.<sup>2</sup> The bill was the same in provision and scope as that introduced by Mr. Dickinson in the previous session. This course was followed in order to encounter as little opposition as possible from the adult suffragists and the more conservative reformers.

Mr. Gladstone, Secretary of State for the Home Department, made a very significant speech in view of the severe criticism of his department because of the way it handled the suffragettes in their raids upon the House. In speaking of the policy of the Government in regard to the bill he said that there was no unanimity of opinion in the Cabinet on the subject, and the Government would leave the decision to the views of the individual members. Speaking for himself, while not approving all phases of the bill, he pledged his vote in its support.

The question as to the influence which the militant tactics were having upon the women's suffrage movement began to play an important part in the debate. In the main these methods were depreciated quite as much by the supporters of

<sup>1</sup> During the autumn and winter of 1907-8 repeated deputations visited the prominent members of the Cabinet presenting their cause before them. February saw new outbreaks of the militant spirit when a deputation attempted to reach the House of Commons. As a result, on the morning of February 12, forty-seven persons were sentenced to prison and two days later their number was increased by a dozen more.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 185: 212.



the bill as by the opponents, with the exception that the supporters saw in the movement the reaction against a deep-seated injustice which the Government must remedy.

The rejection of the bill was moved by Mr. Cathcart Wason, who maintained that the only qualification for representation in the House of Commons was manhood suffrage and not property. He laid great emphasis upon the point that the chief protection of the state rested upon force and those who called themselves citizens must be able to defend the state against all outward attacks. To put a climax to his argument he added that the right to vote would also carry with it the right to sit in the House of Commons which the members would never tolerate because it would mean a divided House. Mr. Maurice Levy, Mr. Clement Edwards and Mr. Mallet opposed the bill on the grounds that it was an undemocratic measure, would grant the right of franchise only to the wealthy women, and would thereby increase plural voting.

The opponents again attempted to prevent the bill from coming to a vote but the Speaker put the question and the bill passed a second reading by a vote of 271 to 92, the largest majority that any women's suffrage measure had ever received. An analysis of the vote shows that each party gave a clear majority to the measure, the Socialists making their vote unanimous.<sup>1</sup> This, however, does not adequately represent the sentiment of the Unionist party be-

<sup>1</sup> The following was the party vote:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Liberal Labor .....	196	52
L. R. C. Socialist .....	24	—
Unionists .....	33	28
Nationalists .....	20	14
	—	—
	273	94

This includes the Tellers. *Liberal Magazine*, 1908, vol. xvi, p. 89.

cause many opponents of the bill remained away from the session while most of those in favor of women's suffrage were in attendance.

The bill was referred to the committee of the whole and, as in all such cases, this was tantamount to withdrawal.<sup>1</sup> On the whole this was the most serious debate on the subject that had taken place up to that time. It was still more or less of an academic question, for no one actually thought that the bill would become a law during the session; yet the seriousness of the situation began to be evident even to the casual observer. *The Times*, an implacable opponent of the cause, assumed a more moderate editorial tone and at least conceded some justice to the cause when it remarked that, "In general the level of debate showed a gravity and sense of responsibility suitable for the discussion of what is a most important problem."<sup>2</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* indicated the real situation when it stated that the vote in the House did not represent the feeling in the country as a whole either among the men or the women.<sup>3</sup> While the members of the House had been converted, at least theoretically to the cause, the country at large was still apathetic. If the politicians had thought otherwise, each party would have been only too anxious to sponsor the cause in order to gain the gratitude of the newly enfranchised electors, and thus perpetuate their power. They were waiting to follow the country rather than to lead in the reform.

<sup>1</sup> So little parliamentary time is reserved for private members' bills that they have practically no chance of passing unless after the second reading they are referred to a standing committee which avoids the committee stage in the House. Lowell, *The Government of England* (new edition), vol. i, pp. 311-14.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, February 29, 1908, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, February 29, 1908, p. 28.

*Deputation to Mr. Asquith*

Following the resignation of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman on April 5, 1908, due to ill health, Mr. Asquith became Prime Minister. The Liberal members who were in favor of women's suffrage arranged for a deputation to wait upon the new Prime Minister to ask for facilities for the Stanger Bill, or at least to get a promise of action from the Government. The deputation consisted of sixty persons, all members of the Liberal party. In introducing the deputation Mr. Stanger assured Mr. Asquith that they were all loyal members of the Liberal party and had no desire whatever to embarrass the position of the Government.<sup>1</sup> He repudiated any connection or sympathy with the policy or the activities of the suffragettes.

In reply Mr. Asquith stated that it would be impossible for the Government to give a week or even two or three days to a bill which was not of its own initiative. He indicated, however, that an imperative obligation rested upon the Government to introduce during the existing Parliament a really effective scheme of electoral reform which would alter the artificialities and delays in obtaining qualifications for the franchise and which would abolish the system of plural voting. When the Government Reform Bill was introduced he said that it would be within the power of the supporters of women's suffrage "to seek to introduce by amendments, or by extension, the object they desired." He pledged that the Government would not resist such amendments for the simple reason that probably about two-thirds of his colleagues in the Ministry were in favor of women's suffrage. The House would be free to make any amendments to the Reform Bill concerning women's suffrage which it desired. His only reservations were that

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, May 21, 1908, p. 10.

any such amendments must be along democratic lines and have the overwhelming support of the women of the country as well as of the men. He also gave assurance that the bill would be drafted on sufficiently broad lines to admit of a women's suffrage amendment.

The announcement that the Government intended to introduce a Reform Bill which would not include a women's suffrage clause tended only to infuriate the militants. The fact that opportunity would be given for the insertion of such an amendment did not satisfy their demands. Miss Christabel Pankhurst, representing the Women's Social and Political Union, made immediate reply. She stated that this policy only confirmed the Union in its determination to fight the Government. She insisted that nothing less than a definite pledge of action during the present session would satisfy the Union. Otherwise they would continue their hostility to the Government by fighting its candidates in by-elections and by the use of militant policies. The Women's Freedom League, which in 1907 had become a separate organization from the Women's Social and Political Union, although believing in militant methods, announced that the members were resolved to renew and would continue their militant tactics until they had secured a definite pledge from the Government to incorporate women's suffrage as part of the Government measure.<sup>1</sup>

The Women's Liberal Federation, which was at the time in annual session, assumed a very different attitude towards Mr. Asquith's statement. Lady Carlisle who presided said: "That was a glorious day of rejoicing. The Prime Minister had opened a way for them by which they could enter into the inheritance from which they had been too long debarred. The Government was vindicated and stood in a

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, May 22, 1908, p. 10.



proud position in which they desired to see it, free from reproach in regard to the whole democratic creed."<sup>1</sup> They accepted the pledge of the Government in full faith and confidence and moved a vote of thanks to the Prime Minister for his pledge to permit a women's suffrage amendment to be incorporated in the proposed Reform Bill. The members of the League were urged to support the Liberal candidates at the by-elections and secure from them pledges in favor of women's suffrage.

The statement of Mr. Asquith that a bill would have to be supported by a majority of the women caused a renewed effort on the part of all who favored women's suffrage. It also aroused more intense opposition among those who opposed the movement. It became a contest for show of strength. There was accordingly organized a National Women's Anti-Suffrage Association which became a very active organization working in opposition to granting the vote to women in parliamentary elections. They distributed great quantities of literature, held demonstrations, and secured petitions against women's suffrage. The suffrage societies likewise carried on a vigorous campaign of meetings, processions, and demonstrations attempting to convince the Government of the demand for immediate action. These extended throughout the country; it was estimated that the Women's Social and Political Union alone was responsible for 10,000 meetings during 1908.<sup>2</sup> They reached their climax in the mammoth demonstration in Hyde Park on June 21. *The Times* estimated that 30,000 people took part in the parade and that it was witnessed by 250,000 people.<sup>3</sup> It declared that no such demonstration had been

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, May 22, 1908, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Metcalfe, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, June 22, 1908, pp. 9 and 11.

witnessed in London since the demonstration of the agricultural laborers in 1884. The editor admitted that after such a remarkable demonstration, judged both by organization and mere magnitude, it would be idle to deny that a great many women were desirous of the franchise. It was time, he thought, for those women who disbelieved in the suitability of their sex for the franchise and for the men of the same opinion to organize and demonstrate their strength correspondingly.

A more serious form of disturbance took place on the reopening of Parliament at the autumn session, October 12, 1908. Because the Government refused to grant facilities, a hand bill was circulated calling upon the public to assist the suffragettes in "rushing" the House of Commons. This appealed to all lawless elements in the community and led to a rather serious breach of the peace. It was brought out in the trial of the leaders of the movement that more than 6,000 special policemen had been placed on duty because of this raid. About the same time those who were sent to Holloway prison refused to obey the prison rules and mutinied against discipline. This was only a forerunner of the trouble which was to follow. The policy which the Government adopted of treating the suffragettes as criminals rather than as political prisoners kept the question constantly before the House and caused a great deal of agitation and criticism. With the development of events in 1908 it became apparent that if the Government did not grant concessions, and there were no indications that it would, a much more serious form of militancy would eventually be restored to. It would be only the logic of events.

Early in 1909 there was a renewed effort on the part of the militants to send deputations to Mr. Asquith and also to reach the House of Commons. As on former occasions they were foiled by the police and arrests followed. When

their prominent members were released from prison, they were welcomed with great demonstrations, which only tended to advertise their movement.

*Howard's Adult Franchise Bill of 1909*

In the balloting for private members' bills, Mr. Geoffrey Howard secured a good place and agreed to introduce a franchise measure. He decided in consultation with the Women's Suffrage Committee of Liberal Members to introduce a bill along the lines mapped out by Mr. Asquith. This would offer an opportunity to get an interpretation of the position of the Government in relation to a democratic measure. The bill as introduced by Mr. Howard was an adult franchise bill and provided that every man and woman of full age, whether married or single, should be qualified to vote at parliamentary or local elections, provided they had resided for three months within the constituency.<sup>1</sup> It was estimated that the bill would enfranchise about 3,000,000 men and between 10,000,000 and 11,000,000 women.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Howard justified the broad scope of the bill on the ground that if it were limited it would be opposed by some group which favored another particular reform and that piecemeal measures were thus sure to arouse antagonism; it was, therefore, better to face the situation as a whole.<sup>3</sup> He assured the House that he was under no illusion as to the chances for success of this bill or any other private members' bill upon electoral reform and insisted that the reform must be ultimately fostered by one of the great political parties.

The women's suffrage societies of the country without a single exception were opposed to this bill because of its

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1909, vol. ii, Bill 21.

<sup>2</sup> In speech made by Sir C. B. McLaren, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. ii: 1369.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1360-5.

broad scope. They believed that this would put insuperable obstacles in the way of women's suffrage and postpone indefinitely the removal of the sex disqualification. While they used different methods they all worked upon the principle that success could be attained only by the removal of the sex disqualification, entirely disconnected from the question of adult suffrage. They did not want their cause confused and hindered by another issue. Neither did they want to wait until the country was ripe for adult suffrage to secure their demands.<sup>1</sup> The bill was supported by the Women's Liberal Federation<sup>2</sup> and the Women's Coöperative Guild although neither one of these was strictly a suffrage organization. The bill was opposed on the familiar grounds that it would change the basis of representation, that the question had not been before the electorate, and that there was no demand for the reform.<sup>3</sup> In closing the debate Mr. Asquith reiterated his pledge to introduce a Reform Bill, along democratic lines, but insisted that such a bill must be backed by the government of the day; it should not be presented as a private members' bill.<sup>4</sup> The bill was ordered to a second reading by a majority of 35, the vote being 157 ayes to 122 noes. It was referred to the committee of the whole and never came up again. This debate was not of so high an order as was the one of the previous year, neither did it attract the popular attention nor cause the press comment. It was apparent that because of the wide scope of the bill the discussion could have little practical effect.

<sup>1</sup>Letter by Mrs. Fawcett, *The Times*, March 15, 1909, p. 4, speaking for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and speech made by Miss Pankhurst, *The Times*, March 17, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Report of Resolution passed by Federation, *The Times*, March 18, 1909, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. ii: 1372; 1399-1407.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 1428-30.



The attempt to present petitions to the prime Minister finally led to a legal struggle over the right of petition. Under this right the militants claimed that Mr. Asquith could not refuse to receive them and that they could not be lawfully imprisoned for attempting to exercise their legal rights. The question was appealed to the Lord Chief Justice who sustained the imprisonment sentences of the lower court on the principle that while the women had a right to present a petition to the Prime Minister, they could not compel the Prime Minister to receive a deputation, which was the chief object of their visit.<sup>1</sup>

The suffrage workers were defeated in every new attempt to advance their cause. The machinery of the House of Commons was used to block their bills. They were unable to secure the support of either dominant political party. They were in effect deprived of the right of petition. Being thus foiled in their efforts, militancy began to take on a more serious aspect. Things had reached a point where the militants must either yield and acknowledge defeat at the hands of the Government or adopt more drastic methods in an attempt to force the Government to alter its policy. The first sign of a more vigorous policy was the throwing of stones during the raids upon Parliament. The damage done was chiefly to windows in the neighborhood of the demonstration. The larger number of prisoners also began to cause trouble. While previously there had been minor infractions of discipline in the prisons there was now inaugurated the hunger strike. The first to attempt this was Miss Wallace Dunlap who was released from Holloway on July 9, in a state of complete exhaustion after ninety-two hours of incarceration. As this policy was consistently carried out by the prisoners, the Government, not to be foiled, adopted the policy of feeding them forcibly. This

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, December 2, 1909, p. 3.

treatment was administered first<sup>1</sup> to Mrs. Mary Leigh in the Birmingham Prison and reported in the press on September 24, 1909. The news of this policy of the Government brought forth a storm of criticism both in and out of Parliament from friend and opponent of women's suffrage. It served as nothing else had to cause increased discussion of the question of women's suffrage on the part of the public.

*General Election of January, 1910*

The great controversy over the budget in 1909 prevented the suffrage workers from making the suffrage question a dominant issue in the political affairs of the day, and they completely failed to make it an issue in the election of January, 1910, as they had hoped to do. The program of social legislation which the Government had been carrying out resulted in a very heavy drain upon the treasury. The increased naval program, occasioned by the rivalry with Germany, meant great additional burdens upon the Government. As a result of these two lines of activities the Government in 1909 faced a deficit of about £16,500,000. While this program had been proposed by the Liberals it was one which the Opposition dared not oppose. A sharp line of cleavage between the two parties developed concerning the method by which this deficit should be met. Mr. Lloyd George in his budget plan proposed that the greater part should be raised by unearned increment taxes on land, increase in liquor license duties, graduated income tax, and increased inheritance taxes. Most of this burden would fall upon the propertied classes, especially upon the landholders. While the new land taxes themselves were not so burdensome, it was the introduction of the principle to which the Opposition objected. The Unionists proposed that the deficit be met by a tariff reform, the revenue to be raised largely from duties laid upon imported foodstuffs.

<sup>1</sup> Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, p. 431.

The Finance Bill based upon Mr. Lloyd George's proposals was introduced on May 26, 1909. This became the important political question before the country. Party spirit ran high. The bill passed the House of Commons on November 4, and was rejected by the Lords on November 30. On the principle that such an important legislative policy should not be inaugurated without first getting the mandate of the electorate, it was decided to dissolve Parliament and make an appeal to the country. The chief issues in the election were, the right of the House of Lords to interfere with money bills, the approval or rejection of the budget, the abolition of the veto power of the House of Lords, and the introduction of a scheme for Home Rule.

With these deeply rooted partisan questions before the country the suffrage supporters were unable to make their demands in any way an election issue. They thus were manoeuvred into a position of great disadvantage. During the election, however, they were not idle; they attempted to secure pledges of support from all candidates possible. Mr. Asquith in answer to a question by the Women's Liberal Federation gave his pledge that the promise for opportunity to amend the Government Reform Bill would survive the expiring Parliament, that it would hold good in its successor, and that the cause of women's suffrage, so far as the Government was concerned, would be no worse off in the new than in the old Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

In all two hundred and twenty-five candidates in their election addresses advocated some form of women's suffrage. In no less than forty constituencies the Women's Social and Political Union conducted campaigns against the Government candidates on the suffrage issue.<sup>2</sup> In eighteen of these the candidates failed to be reelected, and practically

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, December 11, 1909, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, p. 488.

every one of the candidates had his majority reduced. This, however, was typical of the election as a whole. The Liberals were successful, but they were returned with a greatly decreased majority. The Liberals secured 274 seats, the Unionists 273, the Nationalists 82, and the Laborites 41. The position of the Government thus depended upon the support of the Nationalists and the Laborites, the majority of the Government even with this support being reduced to 124.

From the standpoint of the women's suffrage supporters this was a real victory. Previous to the election they had been fighting against a party with such a big parliamentary majority that its position was impregnable. Now they were in a much stronger strategic position because the Government had to depend upon the support of the Nationalists and the Laborites. It was among these members that the suffrage advocates had their most loyal supporters. Thus in spite of the disadvantages of the campaign and election they found themselves in a much better parliamentary position than ever before.

The policy of the militants had placed the Government in a rather embarrassing position. If it yielded to their demands it would do so under pressure and as a result of force. In order to remove this embarrassment and to give the new Government opportunity to carry out its pledge the Women's Social and Political Union announced on February 14, 1910, the day before the opening of Parliament, that they would suspend all militant tactics toward the Government. But in doing this they emphasized the point that this was only a suspension and not an abandonment of hostilities.<sup>1</sup>

The King's speech made no mention of the question of

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 15, 1910, p. 8.



women's suffrage, neither was a supporter of the cause successful in the ballot for a private members' bill. This made some new policy necessary. The development of parliamentary events also made it rather more difficult for the suffrage supporters to get a hearing. The Finance Bill was reintroduced and passed without great opposition. But the whole question of the status of the House of Lords had been raised by the controversy and the Government introduced a series of resolutions which proposed definitely to limit the power of the House of Lords. This completely occupied the attention of the Commons and the controversy became the center of political interest throughout the country. For a while, therefore, the suffrage forces were compelled to work more quietly, but their work was effective.

From the foregoing it is apparent that the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed tremendous strides in the cause of women's suffrage. At the opening of the period it was of little more than academic interest; at the end of the decade it was one of the leading political questions of the day. The militant movement, whether it created friends or enemies, had at least forced the question on the attention of the public. Scarcely a paper appeared which did not deal with some phase of the question. The novel methods of propaganda which were introduced and the enthusiasm of the workers constantly augmented the number of suffrage supporters. Women's suffrage had become a question of which the politicians were compelled to take cognizance.

## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE BECOMES A PRACTICAL ISSUE

As has been pointed out, the question of women's suffrage was different from most political questions in that it cut athwart party lines. Neither of the dominant parties was willing to make it a party issue. While it had become an important public question it suffered the lack of party support. In order to meet this situation the supporters of the cause finally agreed that the best method of procedure would be to appoint a committee, representing all parties, which would assume responsibility for the direction of the movement in Parliament. A Conciliation Committee was accordingly appointed consisting of fifty-four members, twenty-five of whom were Liberals, seventeen Unionists, six Irish Nationalists, and six members of the Labor party.<sup>1</sup> The Earl of Lytton was made chairman of the Committee and Mr. H. N. Brailsford acted as secretary. The Committee attempted at once to frame a bill which would be supported by all parties and all classes of suffrage societies. They found that a most difficult task.<sup>2</sup> The Conservative members naturally wanted only a moderate bill brought forward; many of the Labor party wanted to go to the full length of adult suffrage; the Liberals insisted that the bill should be so constructed as not to increase the number of plural voters or to give undue influence to the propertied

<sup>1</sup> *The Common Cause*, June 16, 1910, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Brailsford, *The Conciliation Bill*, *passim*.

classes. The Committee was so tactful, however, that it secured the support of all parties and all suffrage societies to the bill, in spite of the fact that at first many of the societies demurred from supporting a bill of such limited scope.

In the meantime the suffrage societies held a great many demonstrations. The members of the Conciliation Committee, and party leaders brought pressure upon the Government to grant facilities for the bill.<sup>1</sup> Finally on June 23, Mr. Asquith announced that the Government was prepared before the close of the session to give time for a full debate and a division on the second reading of the bill, but he said the Government itself would not sponsor any contentious measure and could not give further facilities for the bill.<sup>2</sup> While this insured ample discussion, the promoters were not satisfied with such a program since it meant defeat of the measure unless they were granted further facilities. The concession of the Government was, nevertheless, an evidence of a change in attitude towards the movement since under pressure it was compelled for the first time to grant facilities for discussion.

### *Conciliation Bill of 1910*

The Conciliation Bill which was drafted by this unofficial committee representing all sections in the House was introduced<sup>3</sup> by Mr. Shackleton on June 14, and came up for second reading on July 11. The bill as introduced was modeled after the municipal franchise and extended the

<sup>1</sup> It is almost impossible for an opposed private members' bill to become law unless the Government gives the bill some of its own time or assumes control of the bill after it passes the second reading. If some assistance is not granted the bill is almost certainly doomed because there are so many means of obstruction possible. Lowell, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xviii: 488.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xvii: 1202-5.

parliamentary franchise to every woman who possessed a household qualification and women occupiers of business premises of £10 or more yearly value. It also provided that a woman could not be disqualified for registration by reason of marriage if the husband and wife did not qualify in respect of the same property.<sup>1</sup> Under this bill the householders would constitute about 90 per cent of those included within its provisions. The householder could vote if he or she inhabited a house, even a single room, however small, or low the value, provided it was under his or her full control. The bill also included a large number who occupied premises valued at £10 per inhabitant. This would include a large number of small shopkeepers, typists, and other women who had offices of their own, and it would also enable women living together to rank as joint occupiers provided the house was worth £10 for each occupier. As under the municipal franchise, there was no qualification for owners, lodgers, or university graduates. Mr. Shackleton estimated that the bill would enfranchise about 1,000,000 women.<sup>2</sup>

The limited scope of the bill gave rise to a great deal of discussion as to the finality of the measure. Mr. Shackleton was a supporter of adult suffrage yet he introduced this bill in order to get the principle of women's suffrage established in the hope that if it were once adopted it would later be extended to other classes. Hon. Alfred Lyttelton, on the other hand, entirely repudiated this "thin edge of the wedge" doctrine.<sup>3</sup> While he accepted the principle of women's suffrage in limited form, he did not accept the principle of adult suffrage. In the course of the debate he said, "I am unalterably against and I can imagine no cir-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1910, vol. iv, Bill 180.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xix: 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-6.



cumstances in which I would be for adult suffrage. If the honorable member anticipates or if he attempts going even one step further in that direction he must count on my opposition." Mr. Walter McLaren speaking for the various women's suffrage organizations supporting the bill said that while there was no finality in politics yet the women were prepared to accept this bill as a reasonable settlement of the claims they were making.<sup>1</sup> If this bill had become law it would, no doubt, for a time have satisfied the supporters of women's suffrage but it never would have been considered a final settlement of the question.

The limited character of the bill alienated some support from the adult suffragists and was the chief point of attack of those who opposed the measure. The Speaker ruled early in the debate that the title of the bill would not permit amendments to be made so as to extend its scope in order to grant the franchise to women whose husbands possessed the household qualifications, regardless of value. Mr. Asquith asserted that it was a travesty on democratic institutions to present a measure such as this that did not satisfy the most rudimentary requirements of democratic ideas.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lloyd George, who was supposed to be a supporter of women's suffrage, came out openly against the bill because of its undemocratic character. Mr. Snowden defended it as a democratic measure by saying that four-fifths of the women who would be enfranchised by the bill were women who earn their own living. He justified the policy of the Conciliation Committee in presenting this bill on the ground that it was the only means by which they could hope to unite all the differences of opinion and the various factions which were in favor of extending the franchise to women.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xix: 211-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-54.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-24.

A total of thirty-nine speeches were delivered during the two days' debate, both supporters and opponents being drawn from all parties except that no member of the Labor party spoke against the bill. There was scarcely an argument which had ever been presented on the subject that was not mentioned sometime during the debate. In spite of the opposition of Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Churchill, the bill passed on second reading by a vote of 299 to 190, a majority of 109.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the vote shows that the Liberals gave a majority of 101 in favor of the bill with four to the good on the pairing, while the Conservatives rolled up in opposition a majority of twenty-six against the proposition with five against it on pairing. Not even the Laborites were unanimous on the subject, two votes being cast against the bill. The Nationalists were almost equally divided, giving a slight majority of four to the negative. It appears that there were not enough negative votes to pair all of the absent affirmative votes. The Ministers were almost equally divided upon the question, fifteen voting for and sixteen against the bill. The Opposition front bench voted six for and eleven against women's suffrage.

<sup>1</sup> The parties voted as follows on the bill:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Absent</i>
Liberals .....	162	61	<i>Unpaired</i> 32
Paired .....	12	8	
Unionists .....	88	114	41
Paired .....	11	17	
Labor .....	32	2	4
Paired .....	2		
Nationalists .....	19	15	47
	<hr/> 326	<hr/> 217	<hr/> 124*

\* This includes the Tellers. *Liberal Magazine*, August, 1910, pp. 384-85.

The fact that the large majority of 179 votes on the Stanger Bill in 1908 was reduced to a majority of 109 votes on this bill can not be taken as evidence of a falling off in the women's suffrage support. The Liberals had suffered a greatly reduced majority in this Parliament as compared with that of 1908. The Conciliation Bill received a larger majority than the Government had been able to command for any of its bills. During the election campaign the Women's Social and Political Union had worked against the Liberals so that if the Union had any influence it would have increased the Conservative members who in the main were less favorable to women's suffrage than the Liberals.

There had been a determined effort on the part of the Conciliation Committee and the supporters of the bill to have it sent to a Grand Committee rather than a Committee of the Whole House. They realized that reference to the Committee of the Whole would be equivalent to defeat. Both during the debate and in the discussion outside of Parliament it had been urged that a vote to send the bill to the Committee of the Whole would be equivalent to a vote against it. Immediately after the vote on the second reading had been taken, Mr. Lehmann moved that the bill be sent to the Committee of the Whole and the motion carried by a vote of 320 to 175, a majority of 145. A majority of both Liberals and Unionists favored this procedure.<sup>1</sup> There were fifty-five Unionists, fifty-nine Liberals and four Laborites who voted for the bill on the second reading and

<sup>1</sup>	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Unionists .....	176	29
Liberals .....	124	101
Labor .....	5	26
Nationalist .....	15	19
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	320	175

*The Times*, July 14, 1910, p. 9.

subsequently voted to bury it in the Committee of the Whole.

While the supporters of the measure attempted to press the point that a vote to send the bill to the Committee of the Whole was a vote against the bill yet there was a point of procedure involved which influenced a great many votes, especially among the Conservatives. They objected on constitutional grounds to sending a franchise measure to a Grand Committee, believing that such an important bill should always be sent to the Committee of the Whole. It was perfectly evident, however, that there were a great many who voted for the bill and then took this opportunity to shelve it safely for the remainder of the session. But this was not accomplished without a great deal of opposition, for this debate had been taken much more seriously than any of the previous suffrage debates.

All the forces in favor of women's suffrage now began to wage a vigorous campaign for further facilities for the bill. Their demands occupied the center of interest for all the suffrage workers until the dissolution of Parliament on November 28, 1910. The Conciliation Committee led in this propaganda. At every opportunity the supporters of the bill injected the question into the debates on the floor of the House of Commons and demanded facilities for their measure. On July 28, Mr. Lloyd George, in answer to a question by Mr. Snowden, replied for the Government that further facilities could not be granted during the session. He justified this decision by saying that the Government had promised to give an opportunity for effectively dealing with the whole question, but since this bill was so framed as not to admit of amendment, the Government would not grant further facilities for it.<sup>1</sup>

On the debate of the motion for adjournment, which is

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xix : 2338-9.



always an opportunity for attacking the Government, the supporters of the bill again arraigned the policy of the Government in the most vigorous manner.<sup>1</sup> In reply to this attack Mr. Asquith maintained that the Government had adhered strictly to its pledge. He said that when he promised two days for the discussion of the second reading it was with the expressed understanding that no further facilities would be given during the session so that the supporters of the measure accepted the pledge of the Government definitely knowing the conditions and limitations. He also justified the position of the Government by the fact that the members of the House had deliberately voted to send the bill to the Committee of the Whole rather than a Grand Committee with the definite knowledge that this procedure would defeat it.

In the meantime the suffrage organizations were becoming increasingly active all over the country, trying to compel the Government to grant facilities. By November resolutions and petitions urging the Government to grant facilities had been passed by thirty-eight city and town councils, including those of Manchester, Cork, Southport, Glasgow, Dundee, Liverpool, and Nottingham. Since July 12, when the bill passed the second reading, no less than 4,220 suffrage meetings had been held. Some of these were very large demonstrations, especially those in Hyde Park, Albert Hall, Edinburgh, Manchester, Bristol, Leicester, and Nottingham. At a meeting of the Women's Social and Political Union on November 10, Mrs. Pankhurst announced that if the Government did not grant facilities, the truce would be annulled and war would again be declared on the Government.

Parliament reassembled on November 15, and three days

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xix: 2587-92.

later Mr. Asquith announced that the Conference between the two Houses had failed on an agreement over the disposition of the House of Lords and that Parliament would be dissolved on November 28, and a general election would follow. In making this announcement he outlined the program for the remainder of the session but made no mention of facilities for the Conciliation Bill. The friends of the measure were so indignant over this procedure that Viscount Castlereagh moved an amendment to the Prime Minister's motion, demanding that further facilities be given to the Conciliation Bill. In doing this he intended to make a protest against the manner in which the Government had dealt with the women's suffrage question. Mr. Asquith attempted to prevent this amendment from coming to a division because it virtually amounted to a vote of censure on the Government. The amendment failed by a vote of 52 to 199, which was a distinct victory for the Government. Here again the power of the Cabinet and the Government whips made themselves felt and the supporters of the Conciliation Bill proved more loyal to the Government than to the cause of women's suffrage.

Finally on November 22, in answer to a question by Mr. Hardie in regard to the policy of the Government in relation to women's suffrage, Mr. Asquith said, "The Government will, if they are still in power, give facilities in the next Parliament for effectively proceeding with a bill which is so framed as to admit of free amendment."<sup>1</sup> But he refused a pledge to make it a Government Bill in case it passed a second reading. A big meeting was in session in Caxton Hall awaiting Mr. Asquith's answer. His promise did not satisfy the demands of the women. As soon as it was received a strong deputation started to carry a

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xx: 273.

resolution to the Prime Minister. A struggle with the police followed in which the women displayed greater determination than ever before. Windows were broken and Mr. Asquith himself was attacked but escaped in a motor car. Some 156 arrests were made as a result of the demonstration. The Women's Social and Political Union issued the statement, "As the Prime Minister will not give us the assurance that women shall be enfranchised next year we revert to a state of war."<sup>1</sup> The Women's Freedom League took similar action. Thus after ten months of truce militant tactics were again resorted to in an attempt to compel the Government to grant concessions.

#### *General Election of December, 1910*

In the general election which followed in December the Women's Social and Political Union again adopted the policy of implacable opposition to the Government candidates. They carried on anti-Government campaigns in fifty constituences, in ten of which the Liberal candidates failed to secure reëlection. The other women's suffrage societies including the Women's Freedom League worked in behalf of the candidates who pledged their support to the cause of women's suffrage. The election yielded results almost identical with those of the previous January, although there were a number of changes in seats. The Liberals actually lost two seats but the Nationalists and Labor parties gained four seats, which made a net gain of two seats to the Liberal Government, so that they were as dependent as ever upon the support of these parties. The supporters of women's suffrage claimed a much larger number of friends for their cause than in any previous Parliament. Mr. Brailsford's classification of the members

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, November 23, 1910, p. 8.

showed that there were 246 supporters of women's suffrage in all parties, 120 of the less reliable variety, 42 adult suffragists who were reluctant to vote for a halfway measure, and 65 who were either neutral or undecided while there were 193 avowed opponents of women's suffrage.<sup>1</sup>

*Kemp Conciliation Bill of 1911*

The Conciliation Committee decided that members of the committee and sympathizers should ballot for the opportunity of moving a resolution and of introducing a bill in the new Parliament. Following out this plan Sir George Kemp introduced a Women's Enfranchisement Bill which came up for a second reading on May 5.<sup>2</sup> The bill provided that every woman who was a householder should be granted the parliamentary franchise in the division in which she resided.<sup>3</sup> It provided that a woman should not be disqualified because of her marriage but specified that husband and wife could not vote in the same parliamentary division. A woman would, therefore, have to possess a household qualification in another division from that in which her husband resided in order to be able to vote. While it abolished the £10 qualification which was included in the bill of 1910, yet it virtually limited the right to vote to the wealthy women who could qualify in another division. On the other hand it made it much easier for widows and spinsters to qualify because there was no £10 minimum. This requirement was omitted in order to remove the objection urged against the bill of 1910 that it would create fagot votes.<sup>4</sup> The title was also extended so as to make

<sup>1</sup> *The Common Cause*, February 9, 1911, p. 713.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxv: 738-46.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1911, vol. v, Bill 6.

<sup>4</sup> Fagot votes were created by dividing the interests in houses and land with a view to the multiplication of votes for election purposes. Anson, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 127.



amendments possible in order to meet the objection raised by Mr. Lloyd George the previous year. Sir George Kemp estimated that the bill would, if passed, enfranchise about 1,000,000 women.

One of the chief objections urged against this bill was that it prohibited husband and wife from voting in the same parliamentary division.<sup>1</sup> This would disqualify practically every married woman unless she were wealthy enough to qualify in a constituency in which her husband did not reside. It would enfranchise among the poorer classes only those who were widows or those living apart from their husbands and spinsters who possessed the household qualification. Mr. Henderson voiced the protests of the adult suffragists against this limited scope of the bill.<sup>2</sup> While the adult suffragists agreed to vote for the bill on second reading they served notice that in the committee stage they would demand an extension of its provisions.

The bill passed on second reading by vote of 255 to 88, a majority of 167 as compared with 109 in 1910. While the majority was 58 more than that of the previous year, yet that did not represent a clear gain in strength for the movement; the total vote in 1910 was 489 as compared with 343 on this occasion. Each party gave a good majority for the bill, the Labor party making it unanimous.<sup>3</sup> The vote

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Sir Maurice Levy, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxv: 750-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxv: 787-90.

<sup>3</sup> An analysis of the vote shows the following party alignment:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Liberal .....	145	36
Unionist .....	53	43
Labor .....	26	—
Nationalist .....	31	9
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	255	88

did not accurately represent the sentiment in the Unionist party, because a large number of their members who opposed the bill were not present. They realized that the bill would pass and, therefore, did not take the trouble to vote.

The debate was not of the high order that characterized that of the previous year.<sup>1</sup> In fact not a single member of the front benches on either side of the House took any part in the discussion. Very few of them attended; at times both benches were entirely vacant and the Government also was unrepresented. Most of the leaders spoke on the former occasion and now they gave the private members more time for debate. This possibly accounts for the quality of the debate as characterized by *The Times* as being "a debate conspicuous for flatness and platitudinous repetition of threadbare arguments."<sup>2</sup>

### *Negotiation for Government Facilities*

Following the second reading of the bill there was a long period of negotiation with the Government for facilities.<sup>3</sup> The promises of the Government before the election were fairly explicit, yet the supporters of women's suffrage had been deceived so often that they continued to press for more reassuring statements. On May 29, in answer to questions by Viscount Wolmer in regard to facilities for the Women's Enfranchisement Bill, Mr. Lloyd George, speaking for the Government, replied that the promise given by the Prime Minister on November 22, 1910, was that if the bill was read a second time facilities would be given

<sup>1</sup> There were two other franchise bills introduced during the session, both were accorded a first reading without a vote but neither came up again.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, May 6, 1911, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> This is given in detail because of the important bearing which it had upon the suffrage movement.

during the existing Parliament. But the Government was careful not to bind itself to the first session, as it could not foresee the time necessary for its own measures.<sup>1</sup> He said that because of the pressure of the Government proposals, it could not grant further facilities for the present session. He continued: "The Government will be prepared next session, when the bill has been again read a second time, to give a week, which they understand to be the time suggested as reasonable by the promoters for its further stages." In answer to further questions Mr. Lloyd George replied, "We are bound in the course of the present Parliament to find whatever time is necessary to enable the House of Commons to express an opinion even to the final stage upon the proposals." He also intimated that this would be given in ample time to force it through the House of Lords under the Parliament Act of 1911 before the end of Parliament. While this was by far the most encouraging and satisfactory answer that had thus far been given, it was rather ambiguous, and two days later at a meeting of the Conciliation Committee a resolution was sent to the Government which requested that the facilities be made effective. The Committee demanded that the Government agree to use the closure if necessary and that they have the assistance of the Ministers in moving the suspension of the eleven o'clock rule in order to pass the bill.<sup>2</sup>

The next day Sir Edward Grey speaking at a dinner given by the National Liberal Club attempted to clear up these points for the Government. In introducing the subject he said, "It was a very serious matter that the House of Commons should year after year be getting itself into an invidious and discreditable position in regard to the subject

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxvi: 703-5.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, June 1, 1911, p. 10.

by passing the second reading again and again and not showing whether it was determined to proceed with it.”<sup>1</sup> He explained that it was the intention of the Government that the promoters of the bill should have a fair opportunity to defend themselves by the means which the rules of the House placed at the disposal of a majority for defending themselves against obstruction and making reasonable progress.

The Conciliation Committee through its chairman, Lord Lytton, still pressed Mr. Asquith for a definite answer to certain specific questions in regard to the use of the closure. In response Mr. Asquith declared that the term “week” would be interpreted with reasonable “elasticity” and “that the Government will interpose no obstacle to a proper use of the closure, and that if . . . the bill gets through the Committee in the time proposed, the extra day required for report and third reading would not be refused.”<sup>2</sup> He said that while the Government was divided in opinion in regard to the merits of women’s suffrage, it was united in its determination to carry out its pre-election promises as to facilities. These promises were so reassuring that the Women’s Social and Political Union announced a truce of their militant tactics pending developments in order to give the Government opportunity to make good its pledges.

Because of confusing public statements which Mr. Lloyd George had made Mr. Leif Jones on August 16, again asked him specific questions in regard to facilities for the bill supported by the Conciliation Committee. Mr. George replied that, “the Government clearly can not undertake to give facilities for more than one bill on the same subject, but any bill which satisfied those tests and secured a second reading would be treated by them as falling within their

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, June 2, 1911, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, June 17, 1911, p. 12.



engagement.”<sup>1</sup> This statement immediately aroused a good deal of apprehension and suspicion among the supporters of the Conciliation Bill. They feared that some other bill, which was not at all satisfactory to them, might secure a better place upon the ballot and the Government might grant this bill facilities and by this method fulfill the letter of its pledge for facilities and thus effectively evade any responsibility to the Conciliation Committee. With this possibility in mind Lord Lytton again wrote to Mr. Asquith asking for definite assurance that whatever other bill might be introduced next session and whatever facilities were granted to it, the Government would not be relieved of its promises to the bill promoted by the Conciliation Committee. In answer to this Mr. Asquith replied that the promises made by the Government would be strictly adhered to, both in letter and spirit.

This answer seemed satisfactorily to settle the policy and determination of the Government, and even the Women's Social and Political Union suspended all opposition to the Government candidates, and supported those most favorable to their cause. During the summer of 1911 all suffrage organizations carried on a rather vigorous program of education and agitation. Things were thus apparently moving towards a victory for women's suffrage. The suffrage forces were united in their support of the Conciliation Committee. A suffrage bill had passed two successive sessions of the House of Commons with large majorities and the Parliament Act had removed the effective veto of the House of Lords. The suspension of militant tactics also produced a calmer atmosphere in which to consider the question.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxvii: 1912-14.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, August 24, 1911, p. 6.

*Announcement of the Reform Bill*

On November 7 Mr. Asquith received a deputation which presented a memorial on behalf of the Parliamentary Council which worked in connection with the People's Suffrage League. This meeting it seems had been arranged rather on the quiet and nothing had been heard about it among the suffragists. The deputation was presented by Mr. Henderson who called attention to the fact that out of a population of 45,000,000 there were only 7,504,655 enfranchised.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Asquith in reply said that the subject of adult suffrage made it necessary for him to reiterate the promise and pledge which the Government had made to the Conciliation Committee for the next session and by these pledges it must abide. But asserting that a much broader problem was presented by the question of adult suffrage he said, "We believe a man's right to vote depends upon his being a citizen, and *prima facie* a man who is a citizen of full age and competent understanding ought to be entitled to a vote, but he ought not to be entitled to more than one vote." He continued by saying that all the numerous qualifications as lodgers, owners, occupiers, and rate payers ought to be entirely swept aside; that the franchise should be based upon the simple qualification of residence; and that the electors should be placed on the register by a public registration officer. He indicated that the Reform Bill which the Government proposed to introduce the next session would be based upon these principles. While the bill would not include a women's suffrage clause he pledged that it would be introduced in such a form that it would be open to the House of Commons to make an amendment incorporating women's suffrage if it so desired.

This had the effect of a bomb shell explosion among the suffrage forces. They had worked for half a century to

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, November 8, 1911, p. 8.

gain the franchise for women. They had at last received pledges from the Government for facilities for the bill supported by the Conciliation Committee, and now the Government in the face of this, announced its intention of introducing an adult manhood suffrage bill upon its own initiative, a bill for which there was little popular demand or agitation. The cause of women's suffrage was to be left to the mercies of an amendment to this Government Bill. No one appreciated the vital blow that this announcement made more than those who had been working for conciliation and unity among suffrage supporters. This was certain to drive rifts into their ranks which would be fatal to success. The Women's Social and Political Union lost no time in serving notice on the Government that if a Manhood Suffrage Bill were introduced at the next session they would revert immediately to militant tactics.<sup>1</sup> They rejected with contempt the proposal that women should depend for their enfranchisement upon a mere amendment to the Reform Bill.

In order that the suffrage societies might learn more clearly the intention of the Government, they asked for an interview with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George. This was arranged for November 17, at which time a deputation was received representing nine societies; including the Women's Social and Political Union, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Women's Federal League, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Suffrage Franchise Association, and the Actresses' Franchise League. In reply to the speeches made by the representatives of the deputation Mr. Asquith said there had been no recession from the promises for the Conciliation Bill and the Government was still ready to grant facilities for any bill which met the qualification of being capable of amendment.<sup>2</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, November 8, 1911, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, November 18, 1911, p. 10.

argued that the fact that the Government was going to introduce a Reform Bill in no way altered these pledges if the Conciliation Committee cared to take advantage of them. In answer to a question by Mrs. Fawcett, he said the Government proposed to push the Reform Bill through all of its stages in 1912, and that it would be drafted in such a way as to be capable of a women's suffrage amendment. In case such an amendment were adopted he said the Government would consider it an integral part of the bill and be prepared to carry it through its final stages. He contended that it would be impossible for him as head of a Government, himself not believing in women's suffrage and the Cabinet divided on the question, to make it a Government measure, yet it would not be inconsistent, in case the House made an amendment to the Government Bill, for the Government then to assume responsibility for carrying out the will of the House.

The discord the Government plan was destined to cause among the suffrage ranks was shown by the different attitudes which the suffrage societies took toward the policy of the Government. The Women's Social and Political Union immediately issued a statement in which they declared that the position taken by the Government was one of direct hostility to the claims of women and that the introduction of such a measure made any nonpartisan solution of the question impossible. On the other hand, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Women's Freedom League were satisfied that their chances for success had not been diminished by the policy of the Government. A statement was issued which declared that nothing but an unwise handling of the situation could result in failure.

A few days later, on November 24, Mr. Lloyd George made a speech at Bath which apparently reflected his real



attitude in regard to the effect which the policy of the Government would have upon the Conciliation Bill.<sup>1</sup> The meeting was the object of a determined attack of the militants who by this juncture had come to look upon Mr. Lloyd George as the chief betrayer of the women's cause. In discussing the position of women's suffrage and the attitude of the militants he said the Conciliation Bill had been "torpedoed" and the way was now clear for a broad and democratic amendment to the Reform Bill which would insure not a limited class of women chosen by Tory canvassers but one which would include the workingman's wife. He closed with an appeal for women's suffrage and an appeal to Liberals to follow his leadership. Whatever was the thought by Mr. Asquith as to the effect of the Reform Bill upon the success of the Conciliation Bill, it was apparent that Mr. Lloyd George thought it had been "torpedoed." It is difficult to believe that Mr. Asquith also was not shrewd enough to recognize the effect which it would have, although on November 27, in Parliament in answer to questions by Mr. Smith he reaffirmed his former statement that the pledge to the Conciliation Committee held good.

The opening of 1912 saw the rifts within the ranks of the suffrage supporters developing rapidly; it was apparent that the policy of the Government had disrupted the united support which had been back of the two previous Conciliation Bills. Nonpartisan support was no longer possible. The National Administrative Council of the Independent Labor party passed a resolution opposing the policy of the Government and demanded that in any franchise bill men and women should be granted the suffrage on the same basis.<sup>2</sup> They demanded adult suffrage and since there was

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, November 25, 1911, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Independent Labor Party Report*, 1912, p. 20.

at least some possibility of getting an amendment to the Reform Bill, they were not enthusiastic in their support of the Conciliation Bill. The Unionist Suffrage supporters were in the main favorable only to a limited extension of the Franchise and the Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee agreed to resist any amendment to the Reform Bill which would extend the franchise to women on too broad a basis. The Liberal members, on the contrary, pledged themselves to do their utmost to enfranchise women on a broad democratic basis either by means of a private members' bill such as the Conciliation Bill or by an amendment to the Reform Bill. All the suffrage societies had supported the former Conciliation Bill. But now, because of the Government's intention to introduce a Reform Bill without the inclusion of women, the militant group renewed their anti-Government policy and even refused to support the Conciliation Bill. The constitutional suffrage societies continued their support. Big mass meetings and demonstrations were held by both the supporters and opponents of women's suffrage in anticipation of the impending events.

After the King's speech, which made no reference to the question of women's suffrage, although the Reform Bill was mentioned, the militants served notice that militant methods in a most vigorous form would be resorted to. They made good their threats, for on March 1, they took the police unaware and attacked shop windows in the West End of London. They showed no respect of persons; they broke almost every shop window on both sides of the streets which they attacked, including the West Strand Post Office, tobacconists' shops, banks, tailors', and jewelers' shops.<sup>1</sup> Between £4,000 and £5,000 damage was done before they could be stopped by the police. They made no at-

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, March 2, 1912, p. 8.

tempt to escape and on this and subsequent days arrests were made. This was only the beginning of a long series of such attacks which constantly exasperated the public and annoyed the police. With the inauguration of this policy there was a definite break between the militant and the constitutional societies; they ceased to coöperate. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies repudiated these methods as severely as did the anti-suffragists.

*Agg-Gardner's Conciliation Bill of 1912*

On February 16, 1912, in the ballot for private members' bills Mr. Agg-Gardner secured third place and immediately served notice that he would introduce the Conciliation Bill. The Bill was identical with the one backed by the Conciliation Committee in 1911. In moving a second reading on March 28, Mr. Agg-Gardner referred to the fate of the bill in previous sessions but said the prospects were much more hopeful in this session because of the promise of the Government for facilities. He admitted, however, that within the past few weeks the prospects of its passage had been greatly diminished by the deplorable conduct of the militant group, who though hostile to the bill itself desired the enfranchisement of women.<sup>1</sup> He appealed to the former supporters of the bill not to permit their sympathies to be alienated by these events.

Viscount Helmsby opposed the bill chiefly because of the militant tactics which had been used in the attempt to force the Government to take action.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Eugene Wason announced that while he had always voted for women's suffrage, he would cast his vote against it for similar reasons.<sup>3</sup> Sir Edward Grey following this speech said that

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxxvi: 615-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 637-46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 669-71.

he was equally determined to continue to cast his vote for the bill in spite of the militant tactics.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Asquith in opposing the bill did not attempt to hide behind any excuses but opposed it because of the principle which was to eliminate the differences in sex as far as political life was concerned. He reiterated his former statement that the bill was not, according to his belief, demanded or desired by a majority of either the men or the women of the country.<sup>2</sup> Taken as a whole, the debate while characterized by seriousness on both sides did not reach the high level of that of 1910. There was no lobbying, no eager propaganda work by the extreme suffragettes as in the previous year. The lobby was empty and at times there was a very small attendance of members.

The apprehensions of the supporters of the bill were well founded, for the motion failed by a vote of 208 ayes to 222 noes. The majority of 167 of the previous year had been converted into an adverse vote of 14. An analysis of the vote and a study of the circumstances surrounding the situation make it clear that the vote did not represent in any accurate way a change in attitude of the members towards women's suffrage.<sup>3</sup> The greatest change in party vote—one which of itself would have defeated the bill—was that of the Nationalists. It seems that their vote was not

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxxvi: 671-77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 653-56.

<sup>3</sup> The parties voted as follows:

	<i>Against</i>	<i>For</i>
Liberals .....	73	117
Unionists .....	114	63
Nationalists .....	35	—
Independent Nationalists .....	—	3
Labor .....	—	25
	<hr/> 222	<hr/> 208



determined at all by the suffrage question but by the Home Rule situation. They placed the interests of Home Rule above that of women's suffrage and sacrificed one for the interest of the other. The Nationalists under the leadership of Mr. Redmond were anxious to save as much time for the discussion of Home Rule as possible, and they saw in the defeat of the women's suffrage bill a good opportunity to save a week's time for their own cause. There was also the desire to relieve the Government of the embarrassment of the women's suffrage question because there were fears that if the matter were pressed, open friction might develop in the Cabinet which would be derogatory to Home Rule. The Nationalists therefore, voted 35 against the bill, (10 of these voted for it in 1911) and 10 abstained from voting. Among these latter were the Nationalist members of the Conciliation Committee. In 1911 the Nationalist vote had been 31 to 9 for the bill. Their action in 1912 caused no little criticism from the Liberals.

The coal strike which occurred at this time was another contributory circumstance leading to the defeat of the bill. This strike demanded the attention of 13 Labor members in their constituencies. This prevented them from casting their votes for the bill along with the other 25 Labor votes.

The window-smashing campaign of the militants also had an influence upon the vote. It was discussed in almost every speech. Those who continued to support the bill appealed to the former supporters not to be prejudiced against the bill by these tactics of the minority. From an examination of the vote it appears that 28 members who voted for the bill in 1911 voted against it in 1912; 33 members who voted for it, in 1911 were absent on this vote; but only 3 who voted against it in 1911 were absent on this occasion. Only one member who voted against it in 1911 voted for the bill in 1912. At best, therefore, the militants had gained

only one vote, and it is certain that of the 28 who reversed their votes and the 33 who absented themselves a good many were influenced by the militant policy—possibly a sufficient number in themselves to have defeated the bill. This gave especially the lukewarm supporters of the cause a good excuse to change their votes.

Because of these circumstances the supporters of women's suffrage might well claim, as they did, that the defeat of the bill could not be taken as a sign of increasing hostility to the enfranchisement of women. The militants announced that they were not surprised at the results as they had known for weeks that the Nationalists were going to vote against the bill. They reiterated their demand that the Government assume responsibility for a women's suffrage bill as the only possible means of securing its enactment into law; otherwise the amendment to the Reform Bill would suffer the same fate.

The policy which the Government followed introduced so many new elements into the controversy that it had indeed successfully "torpedoed" the Conciliation Bill. For a time there was a strong possibility that this bill might become a law. The injection of the Government Reform Bill into the controversy made this nonpartisan solution of the question impossible. A new plan of attack had to be built up as a result of these reversals. But the staunch supporters of the cause were not discouraged. They began immediately to mobilize their forces to secure an amendment to the Reform Bill which would command the support of all classes of suffrage workers.

## CHAPTER V

### FRANCHISE AND REGISTRATION BILL OF 1912

No electoral reform legislation had been enacted in England since the Franchise Act of 1884 and the Redistribution Act of 1885. In 1912, therefore, it had been twenty-seven years since any change had been made in the parliamentary election laws or in the distribution of seats among electoral districts. During all this time no general bill dealing with the subject had been backed by any Government. One or two so-called piecemeal measures had been introduced to remedy certain anomalies in the system. Such, for example, were the Election and Registration Bill of 1908<sup>1</sup> and the London Election Bill of 1909.<sup>2</sup> For many years franchise and electoral reforms had been among the cardinal demands of the Liberals. They had demanded especially the abolition of plural voting, the simplification of the franchise qualifications, the shortening of the residence period, and the establishment of government machinery for registration. When the question of the abolition of plural voting was presented, the Unionists always appeared as the champions of redistribution. From the Labor party had come the insistent demand for adult suffrage. The demand for women's suffrage, the only reform which aroused any popular enthusiasm, was backed by representatives from all parties, but neither of the leading parties had been able to unite upon it.

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, p. 26.

All the forces which had been working for this or that electoral or franchise reform, centered their attention in 1912 upon the proposed Government Reform Bill. The Government had been unable to secure the passage of the Plural Voting Bill because of the opposition of the House of Lords, but in 1911 the veto of the Lords had been so modified that it no longer offered insuperable obstacles. In order to meet the Liberal demands for electoral reforms the Government, as announced by Mr. Asquith in November, 1911, agreed to introduce a General Electoral Reform Bill in 1912. While this bill did not include a women's suffrage clause it was to be so drafted that the House would be free to amend the bill in this respect if it so desired. It was the promise of this bill, as has been seen, which had played such an important part in the defeat of the third Conciliation Bill.

The bill was introduced for a first reading by Mr. J. A. Pease, President of the Board of Education, on June 17, 1912.<sup>1</sup> Its revolutionary character was shown by the fact that it proposed totally to repeal thirty statutes and partially to repeal forty-seven others. It was thus planned to sweep away in large part the old complicated system and start anew upon a simplified basis. The bill as introduced proposed four important changes in the electoral system.<sup>2</sup> First, it made residence or occupation without regard to value the basic qualification for the franchise. Any adult male who possessed such a qualification in any constituency could be registered as an elector. Another clause made the effects of this provision perfectly clear by abolishing the university constituency and removing the disabilities of peers so that they might be registered as parliamentary

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xxxix: 1325-46.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1912, vol. i, no. 243.



electors. It left untouched, however, the legal incapacities of paupers, aliens, and felons. Second, plural voting was to be effectually abolished by the provision that an elector could not be registered in more than one constituency or in more than one division of a borough or county in which he might possess the necessary qualifications. Third, the length of residence required for the qualifying period was reduced to six months continuous residence or occupation in a constituency. In case an elector moved from one constituency into another he would be entitled to continue to be registered in his old district for a period, not to exceed six months, after he had ceased to reside therein. This would prevent him from losing his vote in his old constituency until he had qualified in another constituency in case an election intervened. Fourth, a system of continuous registration was introduced. The overseers were required to furnish a complete list of all persons possessing the qualifications within their parish to the registration officers. This register was to be published at least once a year and a supplementary list was to be issued each month which would include all changes made during this period. All cases arising out of objections to or changes in the registration were to be tried in the county court after seven days' notice was served. This feature abolished the work of the revising barristers. Inequality of representation was left untouched by the bill.

Mr. Pease estimated that the bill would result in a net increase of between 2,000,000 and 2,500,000 electors in the country after making deductions due to the abolition of some 525,000 plural voters and 49,614 university voters. The chief classes enfranchised by the bill would be male domestic servants living in their master's house and sons living with their fathers or in homes of relatives, and peers. The shorter residence period would chiefly prevent

electors from being disfranchised because of moving from one constituency to another.

The bill was introduced for a second reading by Mr. Harcourt on July 8.<sup>1</sup> It was unfortunate that the Government intrusted the bill to such an avowed foe of women's suffrage. This immediately aroused suspicion that the Government would use all possible means to defeat the women's suffrage amendment although it had announced that it would remain neutral in the matter. The chief points of attack of practically all of the speakers during the first day's debate were that the bill omitted a redistribution proposal, that it abolished plural voting, and especially that the Government was not united upon the most important aspect of the whole problem, the question of women's suffrage. Although the bill was silent upon this subject it was apparent from the very first debate that the question of women's suffrage would be one of the chief considerations in the discussion.

The introduction of previous reform bills, the Government Plural Voting Bill, and even the private members' women's suffrage bills had all attracted much popular attention and commanded a good attendance of the House. Not so with the first day's debate upon this Government Reform Bill. Very little interest was shown; at one time the attendance in the House was as low as twelve. The Government chided the Opposition for demanding six days in which to discuss the measure when their members evidenced so little interest in the question. Chief interest awaited the committee stage when the women's suffrage amendments were to be considered.

The position of Mr. Asquith in relation to the women's suffrage amendment was the cause of the greatest amount of criticism. It was mentioned in some phase in almost

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xl: 1632.

every speech. As pointed out by Mr. Balfour the Government had brought forward a franchise bill which it proposed to push through the House with all the pressure that could be brought by the use of its party machinery. In the committee stage the Government would then abandon the leadership upon the most important part of the whole measure and permit amendments to be made, which the Prime Minister maintained would prove disastrous to the country. If they were adopted by the House, however, Mr. Asquith proposed to use all the machinery of the party again on the third reading to insure the adoption of the bill as amended. It was repeatedly asserted that he had taken an untenable position—that he could not throw this responsibility back upon the House. It was his duty, his critics maintained, to bring forth a definite program on the question and either stand or fall by it. Mr. Asquith in reply to his critics defended the course pursued by the Government on the ground that since the question of women's suffrage ran athwart parties, it was the only policy that any Government could possibly follow, and he called attention to the division in the Opposition over the same question.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Henry Craik appeared as the chief defender of the system of university representation. He predicted the future would witness a strong demand from the younger universities for an extension rather than an abolition of the system of university representation. At the end of the third day's debate on July 12, the bill passed a second reading by a vote of 290 ayes to 218 noes. The debate on the whole was much less spirited than that on the Plural Voting Bill of 1906. There was nothing like the bitter partisan attitude over the abolition of plural voting which

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xl: 2267-77.

was displayed at that time. In fact it appeared that the fight over this question was practically won before the bill was introduced.

The bill was not one which commanded great support from any party or any particular group or section of people. The adult suffragists were not enthusiastic about the measure because it did not go far enough. The support of the Labor party was thus largely alienated. The Liberal women's suffrage supporters were not enthusiastic about it because the whole question concerning which they were most interested was excluded from consideration entirely. The Conservative women's suffrage supporters, for partisan reasons, opposed the bill for fear it would result in advantage to the Liberal party. There was behind the bill no class solidarity to arouse popular enthusiasm. This had been the chief driving force back of the other great electoral reform bills.

The bill did not come up for consideration again until January 23, 1913. During this interval a great many developments had taken place which affected materially the position of the bill and the attitude which various factions took towards it. The anti-suffrage workers did all in their power to complicate the situation and to embarrass the Government. The suffrage supporters themselves were divided as to the extent of franchise which should be granted and the character of amendment to be supported. There was also the Home Rule Bill which in itself had nothing to do with the merits of the question of women's suffrage, yet it had an important practical relation. As in the case of the Conciliation Bill, which the Nationalists had been largely responsible for defeating, there was danger that the same motives would cause them to oppose any women's suffrage amendments. Rumors were rife that if a women's suffrage amendment were adopted there would



be resignations from the Cabinet, which might embarrass the Government to such an extent that the Home Rule Bill could not be passed.

During the summer and autumn of 1912 the militants continued their campaign of opposition to the Government with increasing vigor. They interrupted meetings of Government speakers whenever possible. Stone throwing and window breaking had become a regular policy and there had been occasional attempts at arson. In October the announcement was also made that they would oppose the Labor members as well as the Government members.<sup>1</sup> As the time approached for the consideration of the women's suffrage amendments to the bill, the militants decided to suspend militant tactics so as not to complicate the situation. On January 13, therefore, Mrs. Pankhurst announced that they would declare a truce and that there would be no more acts of militancy until after the Government had acted on the women's suffrage question and the last amendment was disposed of. She, however, reiterated her belief in militancy and served notice upon the Government that if the amendments were defeated there would be more militant acts committed than the Government had ever dared to contemplate.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of all the efforts of the conservative suffrage workers it was found impossible to get the support of all the suffrage forces back of any Conciliation amendment. This in itself greatly lessened the possibility of success. The suffrage supporters finally agreed upon four amendments which were to be introduced in the order of their importance, measured by the number who would be enfranchised by their several provisions. The first, or the Grey amendment, was to omit the word "male" and substitute therefor

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, October 18, 1912, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, January 14, 1913, p. 12.

the clause "every person shall be entitled." The debate upon the principle of women's suffrage was to take place over this amendment. If it should be defeated the Speaker would rule all the others out of order. But if it passed it would not settle the question as the courts had ruled that "person" meant male person. The second, or Henderson amendment, for adult suffrage, would substitute for "person shall be qualified" the clause "a person of either sex shall be qualified." This amendment was supported generally by the Labor party and would place women on exactly the same basis as men. It would enfranchise between 11,000,000 and 13,000,000 women. The third, or so-called Dickinson amendment, would enfranchise the wives of electors. This had the support of Mr. Lloyd George and most of the radical suffragists. It would enfranchise about 6,000,000 women. The fourth, known as the Conciliation Amendment, was practically identical with the Conciliation Bill of the previous year and proposed to give the franchise to women who possessed the municipal franchise, that is, those who were independent occupiers. This if carried would enfranchise about 1,250,000 women. These different amendments illustrate the divided condition of the suffrage ranks.

On January 23, 1913, just before Mr. Asquith introduced his motion in regard to procedure for the committee stage, Mr. Bonar Law made a move to defeat the bill. He asserted that if any of the women's suffrage amendments were incorporated and the Government withdrew the occupation qualification for the franchise, these alterations would so change the nature of the bill, that according to parliamentary procedure a new bill would have to be introduced.<sup>1</sup> He asked a ruling on this point of procedure. The Speaker replied that he could make no ruling in advance upon the

<sup>1</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 643-4.

particular amendments. But he said, "Broadly speaking . . . if such substantial amendments are made during the passage of a bill in committee as materially to affect the form and substance of the bill in such a way as to make it for all practical purposes a new bill, then it is necessary for that bill to be withdrawn and a new bill to be introduced." While he did not apply this principle, the general impression was that if these amendments were adopted then the bill would have to be withdrawn and a new one introduced. As soon as the Speaker's decision was announced, accusations were current on all hands of treachery on the part of the Government and betrayal by Mr. Asquith. The anti-suffrage press took great comfort from these developments.

In spite of the possibility of the bill's being withdrawn, the amendments were proceeded with. It had been agreed under the closure proceedings that the amendments dealing with women's suffrage should be considered first in committee. In accordance with this understanding the first amendment proposed in the Committee of the Whole was the Grey amendment introduced by Mr. Alfred Lyttelton providing that the word "male" be omitted from the bill.<sup>1</sup> The fact that this question entirely ran athwart party lines was illustrated by the opening stages of the struggle. It was the Liberal party which was really committed to the policy of women's suffrage, yet the Prime Minister was opposed to it. The first amendment to bring it about was in the name of Sir Edward Grey of the Foreign Office, but it was introduced by a member of the opposite party—a party which, traditionally at least, opposed women's suffrage.

Mr. Harcourt in the opening speech in opposition to the proposed amendment, made a rather vigorous attack upon Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Lloyd George because of their support of women's suffrage—an attack which caused a

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 882-9.

great deal of apprehension and was used as an argument that if the amendment carried there would be resignations from the Cabinet. He advanced the old argument that women were physiologically and mentally different from men and unsuited to deal with political problems; but he said that if the barrier were once removed he would vote for adult suffrage.

Mr. H. W. Forster, who had been counted among the supporters of women's suffrage, likewise declared his intention of voting against the amendment because of the fear of adult suffrage.<sup>1</sup> This argument had been advanced by the anti-suffragists in order to defeat the amendment and seems to have caused a change in attitude of the less ardent supporters of the cause. The same old arguments were presented on both sides of the question, a good deal of attention being given to the attempt to prove either an increase or decrease in the popular demand for the reform. The effect of militant tactics also occupied considerable time in the discussion.

The statement of the Speaker made the discussion of less practical value than it would have been otherwise because both supporters and opponents of the bill realized that if the amendments were passed the bill would have to be withdrawn. Both the militant and the constitutional societies recognized that there was now no opportunity of obtaining women's suffrage during the session. The Women's Social and Political Union urged both Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Lloyd George to resign unless the Government would agree to make women's suffrage a Government measure. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies demanded that the Government make a declaration of its policy as to how it was going to fulfill its pledges to the women's suffrage societies.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 907-9.



*The Withdrawal of the Bill*

At the opening of the discussion on January 27, Mr. Asquith requested the Speaker to make a definite ruling upon the status of the Franchise Bill in case the women's suffrage amendments were adopted in the committee. The Speaker ruled that if these amendments were adopted, they would introduce a new element which would so change the character of the bill as to make it substantially a new one, and in accordance with the practice of the House the bill should be withdrawn and a new bill introduced.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Asquith attempted to justify the procedure which had been followed by the Government and emphasized the fact that such a ruling was not in the least anticipated by the Government nor a majority of the House. He assured them that the question had not been overlooked by the Government in the consideration and drafting of the bill. It had followed the precedents in both 1867 and 1884 when women's suffrage amendments had been introduced in committee, and in neither case had the ruling of the Speaker been against the introduction of such amendments; in both cases they were debated in committee. He pointed out that the bill was framed deliberately to carry out the pledge of the Government to permit the discussion of the women's suffrage question and the word "male" appeared in the first clause so as to facilitate that discussion.

The ruling of the Speaker made it necessary for the Government to change its procedure radically. Mr. Asquith announced that it would be quite useless to proceed with the discussion of the women's suffrage amendments because they could not be incorporated in the bill. The promise of the Government had been to permit an amendment to the Franchise Bill and to provide for free discussion for the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 1020-22.

same; since this was now impossible, the Government decided to withdraw the bill entirely. In doing this, however, Mr. Asquith pledged that as soon as possible the Government would proceed with electoral reform measures including registration, redistribution, and the abolition of plural voting. In regard to the question of women's suffrage he stated that while it would be impossible for the Government to introduce a bill, yet a private members' bill, if introduced next session, would be granted facilities by the Government. If it carried on the second reading in the House, he promised that the Government would give the bill the same facilities, in regard to the expenditure of Government time through subsequent sessions, as it would give to a Government measure.<sup>1</sup>

Following this announcement there was a debate that continued for five hours during which the policy of the Government and the predicament in which it had placed itself, were severely criticized. Mr. Bonar Law declared that the position in which the Government found itself was only a result of its hand-to-mouth policy of rushing from one bill to another with only time to think how it could continue itself in office another year.<sup>2</sup> He professed not to regret what had happened from the viewpoint of women's suffrage, as a much fairer opportunity could be given to discuss the matter at the next session. He did not attempt to conceal his elation over the advantage which his party had gained by the incident.

Mr. Arthur Henderson accused the leader of the Opposition of being much more interested in securing a party victory than he was in seeing the House consider seriously the demands of thousands of women of the country.<sup>3</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 1022-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1030.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1031-5.

maintained that the proposal of the Government to give a private member time to introduce a women's suffrage bill at the next session did not redeem the pledge made by the Prime Minister. The Government had pledged that if the amendment were adopted by the House at this session then the Government would take charge of the bill until it became a law. He held that the pledge could only be redeemed when the Government promised to assume charge of the private members' bill after it had passed the second reading. He maintained that it would be very difficult for a private member actually to steer the bill through the House in all of its course and follow it through the Lords without the assistance of the Government in more ways than simply giving time.

Mr. Keir Hardie assumed the same attitude towards the position of the Government as did Mr. Henderson. He maintained that in the light of experience it was absurd to suppose that a women's suffrage bill could ever become law without the power and authority of the Government behind it.<sup>1</sup> The manoeuvres of the Government had entirely shattered his faith in the honesty of its intentions. He unhesitatingly declared: "I believe the promise now made is mere chaff to deceive the supporters of women's suffrage outside into the belief that the Government means business when the Government knows that is means nothing of the sort. The decision of the Government will cause not only disappointment but will cause despair to thousands of hearts outside the walls of this House tonight." This was in general the attitude of the Labor members.

The suffrage supporters of both the Liberal and Conservative parties were more generous in their attitude towards the Government. In the main they did not question its good faith but accepted the assurance which Mr. Asquith

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 1062-6.

had given as fulfilling the promises of the Government. The Conservatives attempted to turn the matter to party advantage and cause the Government as much embarrassment as possible. Lord Robert Cecil took occasion to rap the Government for its policy and the extraordinary mess in which Parliament found itself, due, as he said, to the operation of the Parliament Act and the necessity of rushing bills through in order to include them under the provisions of this Act before the end of Parliament.<sup>1</sup> As far as the fate of women's suffrage was concerned it was his opinion that the chances of a private members' bill with the promises of facilities offered greater opportunities for full and free discussion than the procedure which they had attempted to follow under the Government.

Mr. Lloyd George supported the policy advocated by Mr. Asquith, for he believed it would offer a frank and full opportunity for a discussion of the issues. He heartily dissented from the demand of the Laborites in their insistence that the Government assume responsibility for the bill. He pointed out that the present experience had shown the incompatibility of such a procedure with parliamentary methods and this had demonstrated the impossibility of getting a vote upon the issue of women's suffrage when it was in connection with a Government measure. Mr. Balfour was unkind enough to remind Mr. Lloyd George that this procedure had practically been forced upon the House by his "torpedoing" the Conciliation Bill and his machinations to have an amendment introduced to a Government Reform Bill.

It was a much more difficult task, however, to convince the women who demanded the franchise that the Government had not followed a deliberate policy of duplicity in order to defeat their demands. Mrs. Pankhurst at a meet-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. xlvii: 1035-8.



ing of the Women's Social and Political Union held the same evening at Holborn Town Hall denounced the perfidy of the Government in most vigorous terms. The Union blamed Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Edward Grey most severely for the predicament in which they found themselves. The suffrage supporters believed that while posing as friends of women's suffrage these Ministers had betrayed the cause and had connived with the Prime Minister in his dishonest policy. The Union refused to accept the offer of facilities of the Prime Minister as a fulfillment of his promise and demanded a Government measure. If this were refused Mrs. Pankhurst declared that militancy would be the answer. In closing she said, "One thing we will regard as sacred, and that is human life. . . . But while we are not going to injure human beings, if it is necessary to win the vote we are going to do as much damage to their property as we can."<sup>1</sup> The Women's Freedom League, through Mrs. Despard, announced practically the same militant policy in condemnation of the action of the Government. They proposed to protest against man-made law by breaking the law in every possible way. They made an appeal for a great number of passive resisters who would refuse to pay the taxes levied upon them.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, while not denouncing the policy of the Government as one of treachery, did refuse to accept the proposal of facilities, as offered by Mr. Asquith, as a fulfillment of his pledge. They demanded that a Government bill be introduced because it would be impossible for a private members' bill to weather all of the parliamentary procedure without Government assistance. Mrs. Fawcett in announcing at Paddington Town Hall the policy to be followed by the National

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, January 28, 1913, p. 6.

Union said they would cease to work for a private members' bill and they would attempt to secure a women's suffrage Cabinet which would foster a women's suffrage bill. Since only the Labor party would give them full-hearted support for such a bill, they pledged their influence to this party. She emphasized the fact that there would be no change in constitutional tactics. "I think militancy has been our great enemy. . . . It has done us immense harm . . . . we are claiming as other societies are doing, a Government Bill for the enfranchisement of women."<sup>1</sup> The Women's Labor League also appealed for determined political warfare at the ballot box; they repudiated a campaign of childish and futile action.

If Mr. Asquith had deliberately planned to defeat the women's suffrage bills and to divide the women's suffrage supporters, he could not have done it more successfully than by his promise of facilities for an amendment to the Reform Bill. In 1911 their forces were united back of the Conciliation Bill. They could not revert to that position because of factional bitterness. The Government's promise of facilities for the amendment to the Reform Bill had been used to defeat the Conciliation Bill in 1912; and the developments culminating in the Speaker's ruling meant temporary disaster to the suffrage movement. It meant that the constructive forces had to begin all over again in their campaign for unity. Mr. Asquith no doubt did not plan nor foresee the actual turn of events. He himself, however, was unalterably opposed to women's suffrage; he did use all of his power to defeat the Conciliation Bill; he promised facilities for 1912 only because of the growing pressure of the suffrage advocates. When the Reform Bill was promised, he doubtless recognized, along with Mr. Lloyd George, that it would defeat the Conciliation Bill

<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 29, 1913, p. 9.

and that it would be more difficult for the suffrage forces to unite upon an amendment to a Government Bill than upon a private members' bill unaffected with other issues. But he used this method to defeat the suffrage forces without anticipating the Speaker's ruling.

It seems that this method of attack upon the bill was first planned in connection with the amendment introduced by Mr. Pease on January 9, which had for its purpose the deletion of the occupation qualification for the franchise.<sup>1</sup> The members of the City of London declared that the passage of this amendment would deprive the business and great commercial interests of the City of any voice in the Government and would leave it to the mercies of the votes of janitors, caretakers, and the night population, which would be ruinous to the prosperity and position of the City. Both Liberal and Conservative members from the City of London demanded that the City be exempt from the operation of this amendment. In their attempt to preserve the occupation qualification Sir Frederick Banbury discovered the possibility of the bill's being declared out of order in case this amendment were adopted. He consulted the Speaker concerning the point and was informed that it was certainly a point for argument. With this possibility in mind the Conservatives and the anti-suffrage supporters combined their efforts to defeat the bill on point of procedure. This resulted in Bonar Law's raising the question on January 24, and the subsequent withdrawal of the bill.

The outcome of this whole procedure was nothing less than disastrous to electoral and franchise reform. The Government had placed itself in a position where it would be very difficult to get any Reform Bill passed because it had incurred the relentless opposition of the women's suffrage supporters, and their strength, at this time, had to be

<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 25, 1913, p. 9.

reckoned with. Because of the opposition to piecemeal legislation the prospects were not very bright for removing even the more glaring evils in the electoral system. Until there was a change in Government it appeared that if a women's suffrage bill ever became law it would have to be by means of a private members' bill. The policy of the Government had so divided the suffrage forces that no kind of united action seemed to be possible. They were divided into the militant and nonmilitant groups as well as into party factions.

The attempt to secure all the electoral and franchise reforms by one general bill had resulted in miserable failure. After 1912 the movements for these reforms again ran along independent lines. The suffrage forces had to begin to work for unity upon a new basis. Their movement was only incidentally connected with the other proposals of franchise reform.



## CHAPTER VI

### ATTEMPTS TO ENFRANCHISE WOMEN IN 1913 AND 1914

AFTER the withdrawal of the Reform Bill the struggle for the franchise for women began to develop into an impasse from which it was extricated only by the European War. The militants had become so exasperated with the dealings of the Government that they now virtually declared civil war upon society. They stopped short only of taking human life, and even life was constantly placed in jeopardy in their attempts to compel the Government to grant concessions. When the militant tactics were first adopted, they were opposed in the main by the constitutional societies, yet these societies recognized that the militants were arousing public interest and making a certain contribution to the movement. By 1912, however, the constitutionalists became openly antagonistic and devoted as much of their energy to counteracting the work of the militants as they did to attempting to convert the anti-suffragists.

There was also the line of party cleavage. Taking the advice of the Government, the suffrage supporters dropped a nonpartisan Conciliation Bill to attempt to amend a partisan Government Bill. This ended so disastrously that the Liberal suffrage forces became convinced that the only hope for success was by a women's suffrage partisan measure. While they continued to consult with the Conservative suffragists they insisted upon a Liberal Bill. The Nationalists also continued to view the question from a political standpoint and not upon merits; thus the suffrage forces were hopelessly divided along partisan lines. With the supporters of women's suffrage working along these

divergent lines the hope for success of their cause began to vanish.

The militants did not leave the public in doubt very long as to the seriousness of the war which they had declared. Windows were broken, golf lawns damaged, letter boxes opened and letters destroyed, articles in museums damaged, attempts were made to burn private homes, public buildings, churches and cathedrals, and bombs were constantly concealed in public places. On February 19, 1913, a bomb exploded in a house in the course of erection which belonged to Mr. Lloyd George. The next day Mrs. Pankhurst speaking at Cardiff announced that she accepted full responsibility for the act and that the authorities need look no further.<sup>1</sup> A few days later she was arrested and charged under the Malicious Injury to Property Act. When the case came up on April 2, she conducted her own defense and in no way attempted to escape responsibility for the act, but she announced that if sentenced she would go on a hunger strike and would be out in a few days to carry on the struggle. She was sentenced to three years' penal servitude. She carried out her threat and was shortly released in a state of exhaustion as a result of the hunger strike. As soon as she recovered she was rearrested and again sent to prison under the so-called "Cat and Mouse" Act.<sup>2</sup> But after sixteen months, up to the beginning of the war in August, 1914, she had served but six weeks of her three years' sentence.<sup>3</sup> This is only typical of the more serious character of the militant policy which exasperated the public and ceased to make converts for the cause the militants advocated.

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 20, 1913, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> The Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act provided for the rearrest of prisoners who were discharged from prison owing to the adoption of the hunger strike. The purpose was to compel them to serve their entire sentence.

<sup>3</sup> Metcalfe, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

The Government found it increasingly difficult to handle the situation, and to deal with the prisoners when they went on hunger strikes as most of them did. The practice of forcible feeding caused so much public criticism that it was for the most part abandoned. Since the militants were openly inciting people to violence, the Home Secretary issued orders to the police to prevent meetings from being held by the Women's Social and Political Union in Hyde Park and other public places. This led to many a fight for freedom of speech. A little later on April 30, the Headquarters of the Union were raided and the office force placed under arrest. The attempt was also made to suppress their publication, *The Suffragette*; but in spite of the efforts of the police it continued to appear, though somewhat irregularly. The Government thus adopted a more vigorous policy than it had previously pursued, but it cannot be said that it was more effective; the militants could not be deterred from their policy by fear.

In the meantime the parliamentary supporters of the cause were attempting to frame a bill in order to take advantage of Mr. Asquith's promise for facilities. The Liberals had appointed a drafting committee of which Sir John Simon was chairman. The Conservatives had followed a similar plan. While the members of the parties were willing to coöperate and agreed that a single bill was the better course to follow, they found the degree of unity necessary for the drafting of a joint bill rather difficult to attain. Since an agreed bill was found impossible it was drafted along the lines demanded by the Liberals and so framed as to permit amendments to be made by the Conservatives in the committee stage.

*Dickinson's Women's Suffrage Bill of 1913*

The bill was introduced for a first reading by Mr. Dickinson on April 3. and came up for a second reading on

May 5.<sup>1</sup> It was based upon the household franchise. It provided that every woman who possessed the household qualification or was the wife of a man who was entitled to registration in respect of a household qualification would be entitled to register as a parliamentary elector and vote in the constituency were she qualified.<sup>2</sup> She must, according to the bill, have resided in the constituency for twelve months prior to July 15. The bill also limited the right of registration to women over twenty-five years of age. It was estimated that the bill would enfranchise between 5,000,000 and 6,000,000 women.

The question of militancy was uppermost in the minds of the speakers. In fact, of the thirty-eight speakers less than half a dozen omitted some reference to this question. Mr. Dickinson appealed to the members not to be prejudiced against the bill because of the outrageous acts of a small group. Mr. Lief Jones while agreeing that the Government should not yield to violence, pointed out that practically every franchise reform which had been granted by either party had been accompanied by some acts of violence.<sup>3</sup> Sir J. Compton-Rickett saw in the militant tactics the forebodings of what would happen if women were ever elected to the House.<sup>4</sup> If they did not get what they wanted they would proceed to break the rules and regulations as they had done outside of the House. Sir Frederick Low<sup>5</sup> and Mr. Harold Cawley,<sup>6</sup> both of whom had been suffrage supporters, now announced that they would vote against the bill because of the militant tactics.

The fact that the bill was too extensive in its scope also came in for considerable objection. Mr. J. M. Henderson,

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 52: 1704-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1913, vol. v, Bill 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 52: 1811-19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1888-93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1923-7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1952-6.



while he favored a limited extension of the franchise, opposed doubling the electorate at one stroke.<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Hunter assumed the same attitude; he had voted for the Conciliation Bill but he opposed this bill.<sup>2</sup> In fact this was the position taken by most of the Conservative suffragists. There was scarcely an argument which had been advanced against women's suffrage that did not come in for its share of discussion during the two days' debate. Mr. Lynch was the only Nationalist who took part in the debate, and he supported the measure. The absence of Irish participation in the discussion was due, according to Mr. Atherly Jones, to the fear lest they might embarrass the Government and thus endanger the Home Rule Bill.

At the close of the second day's debate when the division was made, the bill failed a second reading by a vote of 219 to 266. On the whole the debate was of an academic character; the arguments on both sides were entirely threadbare. The attendance in the House at one time was as low as fourteen. While it had been conceded generally that the bill would be defeated yet the big majority against the measure came as a great surprise to its supporters. The Laborites and Independent Nationalists alone gave a unanimous vote in the affirmative.<sup>3</sup> The Unionists gave a much

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 52: 1749-52.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1779-80.

<sup>3</sup> The parties voted as follows:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Liberals .....	146	74
Unionists .....	28	141
Nationalists .....	8	54
Independent Nationalists .....	5	—
Labor .....	34	—
	<hr/> 221	<hr/> 269

This gives a total of five more votes than were reported by the tellers in the official record, two in the affirmative and three in the negative. *The Common Cause*, May 16, 1913, p. 84.

larger vote in the negative than was anticipated, a party majority of 113. The Nationalist vote again revealed the fact that the question was not decided on its merits but with reference to the fortunes of the Home Rule Bill.

The vote did not represent a change in belief in regard to women's suffrage so much as it revealed the fact that the question was not of so fundamental importance as its supporters had believed. Very few members of Parliament put this question before party interest or advantage. As long as there were no conflicting motives they would vote for the bill, but under complicated circumstances and a highly charged political atmosphere they were unwilling to take any chance and either abstained from voting or voted in the opposition. The fact that it was a Liberal party bill and not an agreed measure caused a large number of Conservative suffragists to vote against the bill for party reasons. The outbreak of militancy in its new and destructive form also alienated the sympathy of the public. There was deep-seated resentment and a reaction against this destruction of property, especially when it so often fell upon those who were in no way responsible for the policy of the Government. The women's suffrage societies were not especially disappointed over the results because it only vindicated the position they had taken. All of these societies opposed the bill, because they were convinced that it was useless to attempt to secure action by means of a private members' bill. They insisted on a Government measure.<sup>1</sup> They demanded that Mr. Asquith redeem the pledge which he made to them in 1911.

During the whole of 1913 questions were repeatedly put in Parliament, more especially to Mr. McKenna, the Home Secretary, concerning the treatment of prisoners, militant methods, hunger strikes, the amount of damage done by

<sup>1</sup> *The Common Cause*, May 2, 1913, p. 32.

militant outbreaks, and the operation of the "Cat and Mouse" Act. The Government was also constantly under fire for its methods of dealing with the problem. These questions and the criticism of the policy of the Government kept the matter before the House and caused continual agitation of the subject. Things had in fact reached an intolerable position. The Government and the public looked with abhorrence upon the continuance of the situation yet the militants showed no signs of abatement of their activities. From the legislative standpoint there was little hope that any bill could be passed during the existing Parliament.

The prospects did not improve with the opening of the next session of Parliament. In the first place the women's suffrage societies were united in their demands that the question be taken up by a Government Bill and refused to put forth any effort to support a private members' bill.<sup>1</sup> On the ballot for private members' bill no one, who would introduce a women's suffrage bill, secured a place and the Government refused to grant facilities for a bill to be introduced on its own time. This blocked the possibility of a women's suffrage bill in the House during the session.<sup>2</sup>

### *Militancy in 1914*

During the first half of 1914 events were rapidly drifting towards a crisis. The Government was in no frame of mind

<sup>1</sup> *The Vote*, January 16, 1914, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> There was one other recourse for parliamentary discussion which had not been utilized for years—that was the House of Lords. The very novelty of a women's suffrage bill in the House of Lords added interest and zest to the proposal. The bill, which was introduced by the Earl of Selbourne, granted the parliamentary franchise to women who already possessed the municipal franchise and would, according to his estimate, include about 1,000,000 women. (*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, Lords, vol. 16: 7-17.) At the close of the second day's debate the bill was defeated by a vote of 60 to 104. Of the eighteen speeches delivered, eleven were in favor of and seven opposed to the bill. It was evident the bill would be defeated, but it served to keep the subject before Parliament and the country.

to make concessions. Parliament, which at the opening session had been in favor of women's suffrage by a large majority, had now defeated a women's suffrage bill twice and no private member with a place on the ballot could be induced to introduce a bill. In February Mr. Asquith had even refused to receive a deputation of men from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and other Scottish centers. He also refused to meet representatives of the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage.<sup>1</sup> The constitutional societies were placed largely upon the defensive and were under the necessity of constantly reassuring the public that they had no part in nor sympathy with militant methods. In June the Women's Liberal Federation adopted a resolution condemning militant methods in the strongest terms and calling upon the Government to adopt adequate measures to prevent disorders and protect property.<sup>2</sup> Two days later a similar statement in the form of a joint manifesto was issued by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association.<sup>3</sup> Even ninety-four branches of the Independent Labor Party passed resolutions which would prohibit militant suffragettes from speaking from Socialist or Labor platforms.

In spite of the assurances of the Government that it had the militant situation well in hand, the conditions during 1914 continued to grow worse. The number of crimes and their seriousness continued to increase. In the first seven months of 1914—that is, until the beginning of the war—there were a total of 141 of these outrages reported in the papers.<sup>4</sup> While the Government was supposed to have taken steps to deal with the problem, only thirty-five arrests

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 16, 1914, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, June 11, 1914, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, 1914, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Metcalfe, *op. cit.*, p. 319.



were made. These crimes ranged all the way from window smashing to the burning of historic churches and cathedrals, the bombing of houses and public buildings, the destruction of works of art, and personal attacks upon public men. In the earlier stages of militancy before violent methods were adopted, the militants had succeeded in directing public attention to their cause. They removed the question of women's suffrage from the realm of discussion to the realm of politics. They were successful in getting their arguments before the public through the press. But after 1913 their methods caused a very strong reaction. The papers no longer published their speeches or suffrage arguments, but gave only accounts of their crimes and their violations of law. Thus the whole purpose of their agitation was lost sight of and they were looked upon as a public menace; deportation was often advocated. This policy alienated friends, turned indifference into hostility and transformed passive into active opposition. It resulted in arousing a passionate resentment and detestation of the whole cause of women's suffrage, and the public loathed the prospects of granting political power to women who had committed these crimes. In the early days of militancy the crowd was usually in sympathy with the militants and against the police, but now the situation was reversed. The crowd frequently used very rough tactics with the militants and the police were often unrestrained in the use of force and even brutality in handling the women. But hardships, rough handling, forcible feeding, imprisonment, public disdain had no deterring power for these women. In fact, some of them were convinced that only martyrdom could bring about the triumph of the cause which they held dearer than life itself; they did not shrink even from this sacrifice. These things exasperated the Government and the public the more because during these months they were absorbed in the Irish Home Rule Bill and the threatened

Ulster rebellion. They had neither time nor disposition to deal with questions of franchise reform.

On the outbreak of the European War in August, 1914, the militants immediately declared a truce for the period of hostilities and turned their organization and energy into relief work for the women, children, and the wounded.<sup>1</sup> The constitutional societies took similar action; the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies mobilized their forces in nearly 600 societies for relief work, and on September 25, announced the suspension of their ordinary political activities. Three days after the declaration of war the question was raised in the House of Commons concerning the release of all political prisoners. On August 10, Mr. McKenna announced that the remainder of the sentences of all persons imprisoned because of crimes in connection with suffrage agitation had been remitted and that they were to be released.

Thus both the suffrage supporters and the Government were able to extricate themselves from the impasse into which the controversy had developed. Things had reached an unbearable position on both sides; it had become a question of endurance between the militants, the Government, and the public. With this national emergency neither side had to acknowledge defeat; they were brought together in the common cause for the nation. The women were given an unusual opportunity to display their heroism and to demonstrate their contribution to the strength and defense of the state. Little did the militants foresee that their watchword and slogan, "Deeds, not words," would be wrought out under such unexpected and tragic circumstances. For a time the question of women's suffrage entirely dropped from public discussion or consideration. The whole attention of the nation was diverted from domestic controversies to the problem of national existence.

<sup>1</sup> *The Vote*, August 14, 1914, p. 278.

## CHAPTER VII

### ATTEMPTS TO ABOLISH PLURAL VOTING IN 1913 AND 1914

THE attempt of the Government to deal with all the franchise and registration questions in the Reform Bill of 1912 had resulted in the failure of the bill and embarrassment to the Government. This placed the Government, in relation to franchise reform, in a difficult position. If it introduced another general reform bill without including women's suffrage it feared the opposition of the members of the Labor party together with a large number of other women's suffrage supporters as well as the combined opposition of the women's suffrage societies. These, together with the Conservatives, presented an opposition which was entirely too formidable. The Government, therefore, adopted the policy of dealing with the questions included in the Reform Bill by piecemeal. It hoped to obtain its most cherished reforms by this means and thus avoid the question of women's suffrage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> At one time there was the possibility that the Government might assume the responsibility for the Baker Bill. This was introduced in February, 1912, by Mr. Harold Baker and had for its sole purpose the abolition of plural voting. *Parliamentary Papers*, 1912, vol. v, Bill 1. While this was not a Government Bill Mr. Baker had had the assistance of the Solicitor-General in drafting the measure. The Government was interested in keeping this bill alive so that in case the Reform Bill was not passed, it could then make this a Government measure and thus abolish plural voting by a single act. But so disastrous was the withdrawal of the Reform Bill that the Government dared not immediately sponsor this measure and it never came up again although it passed a second reading on March 1, 1912.

*Plural Voting Bill of 1913*

Following out this policy of the Government, Mr. Pease, author of the Reform Bill of 1912, on April 8, 1913, asked permission to introduce a bill dealing with plural voting.<sup>1</sup> The bill was very short, dealing with only the one subject. It provided simply that at a general parliamentary election an elector who was registered in more than one constituency could not vote in more than one of the constituencies in which he was registered.<sup>2</sup> This prohibited plural voting only in the general elections. In by-elections an elector could vote in any constituency in which he was registered. The bill included universities within the meaning of constituencies. The penalty imposed for a violation of the statute was a maximum fine of £200 or a maximum period of one year's imprisonment as well as incapacitation from holding any judicial or public office or voting in any election for a period of seven years. Mr. Pease estimated that the bill would eliminate something like 525,000 plural voters at the general election.

The familiar arguments advanced by the Opposition against the bill were that it dealt only with one anomaly which was for party advantage and that it left untouched the far greater evil of redistribution. The Unionist, in the main, defended the plural voter because of the stake which the property holder had in the locality. Some admitted that the plural voter was, to an extent, an anomaly, though not necessarily an evil. They were not alone in their opposition to the policy of the Government. Mr. Snowden speaking as a member of the Labor party assured the Government that he would oppose the bill at every stage in spite of the fact that he favored the abolition of plural

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 51: 1015.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1913, vol. v, Bill 240.



voting. He resented the fact that the Government had postponed to an indefinite day the question of an effective scheme of electoral reform and from the wreckage of the Reform Bill had selected one item which from the point of importance and urgency was the least important. "I shall," said he, "oppose the bill, because I believe it will, if passed, indefinitely postpone a more comprehensive scheme, and I shall oppose it most of all because I believe it is a deliberate attempt on the part of the Government to evade the very definite promise they have given to the women of the country in regard to women's suffrage."<sup>1</sup>

The Government defended the bill on the ground that it was a short measure which dealt with a single anomaly, and that it was the purpose of the Government to bring in a general reform bill which would deal with redistribution before the next general election. It, however, refused to add a clause to the bill which would make it inoperative until a redistribution bill was passed. The bill passed the second reading by a vote of 314 to 227.

The committee stage occupied five days, one of which was an all-night session. The chief amendments offered attempted to limit the scope of the bill. The most important of these provided that the scope of the bill be limited to those registered in respect of ownership; to exempt the university constituencies from the provisions of the bill; to exempt the City of London from its scope; to exempt all plural voters at the time of the passage of the bill from its operation; to postpone the operation of the bill till January 1, 1916; and to exclude Ireland from the scope of the measure. The Government was unyielding in its position and was strong enough to prevent any of the amendments from being adopted. The bill passed a third reading by a vote of 293 to 222.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 52: 1249.

The bill was read a first time in the House of Lords without discussion and came up for a second reading on July 24. There were again marshalled in review the chief Unionist arguments against the abolition of the plural voter. The defeat of the bill by the House of Lords was inevitable; the debate was not very animated and little interest was shown on either side. In fact when the bill came up for discussion there were only fourteen supporters of the Government present. The bill was disposed of by the Lords in one sitting, being defeated by a vote of 42 ayes to 166 noes. This was not a final disposition of the bill; it was reintroduced the next session according to the provision of the Parliament Act of 1911. The debate occasioned no interest outside of Parliament and caused no general public discussion. In fact there were no editorial comments on the subject when it passed a third reading in the House; *The Times* did not even mention the matter when it was defeated by the Lords on a second reading.

### *London Election Bill of 1913*

At the same time that the plural voting bill was before Parliament, another bill was introduced which had for its chief object the consolidation of London into a single parliamentary constituency, thus abolishing plural voting in this district. The measure was introduced by Mr. Glanville on May 2, as a private member's bill.<sup>1</sup> It was essentially the same as the bill introduced by the Government in 1909 and defeated by the Lords. It adopted the principle of successive occupation for the whole of the borough of London which was made one parliamentary constituency instead of the twenty-eight into which the metropolis was divided.<sup>2</sup> The bill also provided that the clerk of the London County

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 52: 1547.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1913, vol. iv, Bill 6.

Council should be the registration authority for the whole of the constituency which would make for much greater uniformity in registration.

This bill was characterized by the Opposition as "another example of the wire puller's art." Besides objecting to the abolition of the plural voter in London they also criticised the Government severely for its duplication of bills upon the same subject and the consequent waste of parliamentary time. This was not a Government bill, but the criticism seemed to be justified by the fact that within a week three bills had been introduced dealing with electoral matters. All the points touched upon in this bill were covered by bills already before Parliament. On division the bill passed a second reading by a vote of 193 to 103 and was referred to a standing committee. The bill was reported back to the House without amendment but it never came up again.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Plural Voting Bill of 1914*

The Plural Voting Bill which was defeated by the Lords in 1913 was reintroduced in 1914 and came up for second reading on April 27.<sup>2</sup> The Conservatives laid special emphasis upon the fact that the bill was not accompanied by a redistribution measure. In answer to this charge Mr. Pease, on behalf of the Government, offered to confer with the Opposition as to a basis for a redistribution bill. This overture was refused by Mr. Pretymann on the ground that they could not enter into any such agreement until they knew what the Government proposed to do with the Home

<sup>1</sup> During the session bills were introduced to shorten the registration period, to enable absent voters to vote at parliamentary elections, to provide for redistribution and to enable soldiers and sailors on duty and absent from their parliamentary constituencies to cast their votes at parliamentary elections. None of these bills received more than a first reading.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 61: 1379.

Rule Bill, especially since redistribution chiefly affected Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Lord Hugh Cecil did not let the opportunity go by without bringing up the matter of women's suffrage and attacking the Government for its dealing with the question.

During the third reading, on both sides of the House, the attitude toward the bill was based entirely upon party considerations. The Conservatives defended the plural voter upon a variety of grounds, all of which came back to the distrust and fear of democracy and the protection of property. Realizing that they would be outvoted, they attempted to use every argument possible to cause dissension among the supporters of the Government. They were especially artful in the use of the Irish question for this purpose.

The bill came up for a second reading in the House of Lords on July 15. The debate recapitulated the old arguments on the question and occupied only a few hours, for it was evident that the bill would be defeated and no amount of discussion would change any votes. Little interest was shown in the procedure. The Lords lived up to their reputation and rejected the bill, for a second time, by the vote of 49 to 119. As in the previous year the bill attracted no popular attention and was discussed and defeated with practically no comment in the press, so concerned was the public over the Irish situation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. ii: vol. 63: 878.

<sup>2</sup> Several other bills dealing with minor phases of electoral machinery and methods were introduced during the session in 1914. A bill requiring that all contested elections, at a general election, be held on the same day, was accorded a second reading and came up to the report stage but got no farther than this. Bills were also introduced which granted the right of franchise to absent voters, to shorten the period of registration, to provide for preferential voting and alternative voting, but none of these were accorded more than a second reading. A resolution introduced by Mr. Lyell favoring alternative voting in parliamentary elections was passed by a majority vote.



In 1914 the prospects were that the Plural Voting Bill would be pushed through the next session of Parliament and become law under the provisions of the Parliament Act of 1911. The Liberals had been, up to the beginning of the war, in power for eight years and had not passed a single important measure in relation to franchise and electoral matters. The bills dealing with plural voting had all been defeated by the House of Lords and the one general franchise reform bill had been withdrawn by the Government. With the beginning of the war the discussion of franchise and electoral questions was dropped, but it came up again rather unexpectedly in connection with the franchise rights of the military and naval forces. This paved the way for general legislation upon the whole subject.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EMERGENCY PARLIAMENTARY AND REGISTRATION LEGISLATION

WITH the beginning of the war a general political truce was entered into. The Government agreed not to foster any bill of a controversial nature but to confine its activities entirely to the prosecution of the war and matters that related thereto. It was the general feeling in both parties that it would not be to the best interest of the Empire to have a general election during the war. In July, 1915, a bill was passed which postponed all municipal and local elections for the year.<sup>1</sup> It also provided that all registration should cease on July 31, 1915, which meant that the old register of 1914 continued in force although its duration was limited to December 31, 1916.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Parliament and Registration Act of 1916*

On January 27, 1916, four days before the life of the existing Parliament would have legally terminated, the Parliament and Registration Bill received the Royal assent. This law extended the life of Parliament for eight months. It also provided that the bills under the Parliament Act of 1911 would not be lost simply because they were not passed at the succeeding session of Parliament. This kept alive the Plural Voting Bill and permitted it to be introduced any time during the continuance of the existing

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 73: 1833-72; 2457.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1914-1916, vol. i, Bill 138.

Parliament. The law of the previous July was also amended so that the register was to continue in force until Parliament provided a substitute and no steps were to be taken to provide a register until directions were given by Parliament. This act virtually suspended the whole registration machinery.

The Parliament and Registration Act obviously did not settle any question permanently; it was only a temporary measure. Very soon after its passage the members of Parliament began to ask the Prime Minister what policy the Government proposed to follow in regard to registration, in regard to the treatment of men who were disqualified because of being absent in the army, navy, and various kinds of war services, and concerning the next general election and the duration of the existing Parliament. While there was very little demand for an election during the war, the question of the register did present an immediate problem. A cabinet crisis might arise at any time which would make an election inevitable even during the war. If an election occurred it would have to be held under the register of 1914 which, because of changes in residence and absence from constituencies in war work, included only about 50 per cent of the electors. This presented not a simple but a very complex problem and opened up the whole franchise question again. If a new register were to be prepared, the old limitations based as they were so largely upon occupancy, would have to be changed so as to bring the soldiers, sailors, and munition workers, who were absent from home, on the register, and also to provide machinery which would be effective in enabling them to vote. Such changes would virtually amount to adult manhood suffrage which would be an extension of the franchise. Thus the whole question of franchise qualifications was involved. With these questions under consideration by the Government, the advo-

cates of women's suffrage, with the new argument of the splendid national service performed by women during the war, came forward and insisted that if all these questions came within the scope of a registration scheme, so must also the statutory limitations as to sex. They demanded that if the sex disqualification could not be removed by a registration bill, then the Government must deal with the whole question by means of a franchise bill.

*Select Committee of 1916*

On July 12, 1916, Mr. Asquith announced that since the Government had been unable to agree upon an uncontroversial solution of the franchise and registration problems, it had decided to ask the House to set up at once a Select Committee which would deal with all of these matters.<sup>1</sup> It was the intention of the Government that this Select Committee should decide; first, whether a new register should be made; second, whether all men in the army and navy should be placed on a new register; third, how men in service were to cast their votes while on duty; fourth, how munition workers who had been disqualified were to be placed on the register; fifth, whether women should be placed on the register; and finally, whether there should be a general election during the war. Mr. Herbert Samuel, Secretary of State for the Home Department, who introduced the motion, was rather half-hearted in his support of this method of procedure and he was doubtful whether it would be able to accomplish anything.<sup>2</sup>

He was not left in doubt very long as to the attitude of the House towards the proposition. Sir Edward Carson immediately launched a vigorous attack upon the policy of the Government.<sup>3</sup> He held up to ridicule the idea

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 84: 343-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1039-45.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1045-52.



that the Government should turn over this task, which it could not agree upon, to a committee. He accused the Government of destroying the register of 1915 when it was in the process of preparation so they could further postpone a general election. "This committee," said he, "will lead to nothing. This committee is a farce. The Hon. Gentleman has proposed it as a farce." All of the eight speakers who followed Mr. Samuel in the debate criticised the policy of the Government. It was the consensus of opinion that all of these problems ought to be settled by the Government and not by a committee which had no power and whose decision would in no way be binding.

Mr. McNeill, one of the members named on the Committee, declined to serve because of the discouraging outlook presented by Mr. Samuel and the opposition to the plan of the Government which developed. Mr. Asquith, evidently having been informed as to how the debate was going, hastily appeared in the House while Mr. McNeill was speaking and after attempting to explain the position of the Government, said he did not wish to press the matter.<sup>1</sup> He announced that the Government would make a proposition of its own and asked leave to withdraw the motion. Such a procedure as this in normal times might easily have proved fatal to the Government; under the circumstances it was universally taken as an evidence of the inability of the Government to deal with difficult problems—one among many other signs of its weakness.

The Government was now compelled to find a way out of the difficulty, and it had to face the matter with impaired prestige. The increasing volume of criticism against the incapacity of the Government made the need for a new register all the more urgent. While there were comparatively few who demanded an election at this time, there

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series; vol. 84: 1073-5.

were a great many who were apprehensive lest a crisis might arise at any time which would necessitate a general election. With the approach of the termination of the life of Parliament in September some definite policy and action were necessary.

The Unionist War Committee took advantage of this situation and Sir E. Carson served notice upon Mr. Asquith that they would oppose any extension of the life of Parliament which was not accompanied by a bill to make a new register.<sup>1</sup> The Unionists were supported in this action by the Liberal War Committee. They also demanded that this register include soldiers and sailors who were serving or had served with the forces during the war. This involved, of course, changing the basis of the registration and of the franchise qualifications.

The women's suffrage societies were keenly alive to the possibilities of the situation. On August 4 they sent a statement to Mr. Asquith in which they made their position very clear in regard to registration reforms. They stated that if the registration reforms were limited to insuring that men who were already on the parliamentary register should not be disqualified by reason of absence on war work, then they would not oppose such legislation. But if the Government proposed to make changes which would establish a new voting qualification or shorten the period of residence so as to put new names on the register, then this would involve the question of the rights of women and they must be included.<sup>2</sup> This was signed on behalf of thirteen women's organizations. They were supported in this position by Lord Robert Cecil, and the great body of women's suffrage advocates.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, August 11, 1916, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *The Common Cause*, August 11, 1916, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 7, 1916, p. 4.

*Special Register Bill*

The Government finally decided to deal with the questions in two separate bills.<sup>1</sup> The first of these, the Parliament and Local Election Bill, provided for the extension of Parliament for seven more months, that is, to April 30, 1917. This bill was hurried through Parliament, met with very little opposition, and received the Royal assent on August 23.<sup>2</sup> The second of these bills, the Special Register Bill, was introduced on August 16.<sup>3</sup> It provided for a new register which was to go into effect May 31, 1917. In order to make this new register as nearly up to date as possible, the qualifying period was postponed from July 15 to November 1. In order to deal with the questions of disqualifications and yet not introduce the women's suffrage question, the bill provided that all those who were otherwise qualified but who had left their homes to engage in any kind of war work would not be disqualified but would be placed on the register, whether or not they had retained their qualifying premises. It also placed on the register all those who were interrupted in the course of their qualification by entrance into national service. No attempt was made generally to enable soldiers and sailors or those away from home to cast their votes or to shorten the period of qualification.

The Government justified this policy on the ground that any other course was fraught with so many political problems of a controversial nature that it was impossible to deal with them during the existing crisis. If the soldiers and sailors were placed on the register, that raised the practical and military question of enabling them actually to

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 85: 1447-58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2701.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1650; 1891.

cast their votes. But the real problem from the standpoint of the Government was that this could not be accomplished without including the question of women's suffrage which opened up again the old controversy. The Government decided, therefore, to introduce only a temporary measure, dealing with the question of registration and not attempting to alter the franchise qualifications.

As was expected this proposal encountered very strong opposition. The attack on the policy of the Government was led by Sir E. Carson because the bill did not include provision for the enfranchisement of soldiers and sailors and machinery which would enable those at the front to cast their votes.<sup>1</sup> This bill proved almost as humiliating to the Government as its proposal for a Select Committee. Of the fourteen speeches made eleven were opposed to the bill; no one spoke in favor of the bill except members of the Government. Even Mr. Long, the author of the bill, attempted to justify it on the ground that under the circumstances it was the best the Government could do in a makeshift fashion without taking up the whole franchise question.

During the debate two possibilities were suggested, which prevented open revolt against the policy of the Government. The first was the possibility of amending the bill, by means of instructions, before going into the committee, so as to include the enfranchisement of soldiers and sailors. The other was the possibility of amending the Ballot Act so as to enable soldiers and sailors, who were absent from their constituencies, to vote. When the bill came up again after adjournment on November 1, the Speaker ruled that any such instructions to include soldiers and sailors within the scope of the bill would constitute a new bill. This deprived the measure of its last friend and it was later withdrawn by the Government.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 85: 1891-8.



Thus another attempt to deal with the registration question ended in humiliation for the Government and utter failure to obtain a new register. Yet from the discussion of this bill came a suggestion which was destined to lead to a happy solution of the franchise and registration difficulty.

## CHAPTER IX

### REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT 1918

DURING the debate on the Special Register Bill on August 16, when the Government was in vain attempting to provide even a temporary register, a suggestion was made which was destined to make a compromise possible and to initiate the most far-reaching reform in the English franchise system. Mr. Asquith was hard pressed in attempting to defend the policy of the Government and in the course of his speech appealed to the House to undertake during the war a reform by general agreement which would solve these problems. "Let us by all means use the time—those of us who are not absolutely absorbed in the conduct of the war—in those months to see if we cannot work out by general agreement some scheme under which, both as regards the electorate and the distribution of electoral power, a Parliament can be created at the end of the war capable and adequate for discharging these tasks and commanding the confidence of the country."<sup>1</sup> A little later in the debate Mr. Long, the author of the bill, pleaded with the members of the House not to find fault with the bill before them, but seriously to set about to find a solution of the whole situation. In order to do this he made a definite suggestion of procedure. "I myself believe that if we agreed among ourselves . . . to set up . . . a representative Conference, not only of parties, but of groups, a Conference which would really represent opinion on these

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 85: 1906.

three subjects: electoral reform, revision of your electoral power when you have got it, and registration, I believe . . . that such a Conference of earnest men, holding strong views, bitterly opposed to each other, if they were face to face with these difficulties, when we are longing with a great longing to see something of a better prospect for our country in the future, would produce an agreed system for all three questions upon which the great mass of opinion of the people of this country could come together.”<sup>1</sup> He further suggested that such a Conference begin its deliberation during the recess of Parliament.

### *Conference on Electoral Reform*

This suggestion caused immediately a great deal of discussion in political circles and was received on all sides with favor. It was looked upon as a possible solution for the vexing problems. Shortly afterwards Mr. Asquith requested the Speaker, Mr. James W. Lowther, to convene such a Conference and preside over its deliberations. This was a happy choice and augured much for the success of the undertaking. Invitations to members were issued early in October and the Conference held its first meeting on October 12, 1916.

Great care was taken in selecting the personnel of the Conference so that all parties, groups, and shades of opinion would be properly represented. There were thirty-two members, five from the Lords, three Unionists and two Liberals, and twenty-seven from the House. Of the latter there were eleven Unionists, ten Liberals, three Nationalists, and three representatives from the Labor party. From the standpoint of women's suffrage both sides were represented by staunch supporters. There were fifteen suffragists, eleven decided anti-suffragists, two so-called “wob-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 85: 1949-50.

blers," and four Irish members, who from their records were quite incalculable.<sup>1</sup> There were representatives who believed in the radical doctrine of adult suffrage, of one man, one vote. They were counterbalanced by those who mistrusted the masses and wanted the rights of property adequately guarded by the plural and university vote.

According to the terms of reference, as stated by Mr. Bonar Law to the House on October 10, the Conference was, "To examine and, if possible, submit agreed resolutions on the following matters:

- " (a) Reform of the Franchise.
- " (b) Basis for the Redistribution of Seats.
- " (c) Reform of the system of the Registration of Electors.
- " (d) Method of elections and the manner in which the costs of elections should be borne."<sup>2</sup>

At the request of Mr. Lloyd George, when he became Prime Minister in December, 1916, the Conference continued its work. The final report was made to the Prime Minister on January 27, 1917. This report was a remarkable document, presenting a unanimity of recommendations which even under the stress of war could scarcely have been expected upon such highly controversial questions. In all there were thirty-seven resolutions and thirty-four of these were agreed to unanimously by the Conference. The resolutions covered all the points that were included in the terms of reference. They recommended that the qualifying period for registration be reduced to six months, that there should be revision twice a year, and that the cost of registration should be borne by local and national governments.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Nation*, vol. xx, 1916, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 86: 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1917, Cd. 8463.



In regard to franchise they recommended that only three qualifications be retained—residence, business occupation, and university representation. A compromise was reached in regard to plural voting; an elector was to be entitled to one vote in respect of residence and another vote in another constituency in respect of either business occupation or university representation. On the question of redistribution they recommended that the normal unit should be 70,000 population with exceptions for special cases. The principle of proportional representation and alternative voting were also recommended for certain constituencies. Provisions were included whereby soldiers and sailors were to be placed upon the register and the principle of absent voting was approved. In regard to the most difficult part of the whole problem, that of women's suffrage, while not unanimous on this point, the Conference recommended that the parliamentary franchise be conferred upon all women who were on the local government register or who were wives of men who were on this register provided they had attained a certain age which was not agreed upon. Definite limitations were recommended for candidate's election expenses and the disqualifications because of poor relief were abolished.

The resolutions of the Conference were accepted almost universally in political circles as making a great advance on the difficult road of franchise reform. The unanimity of the resolutions was a surprise even to those who had been the most sanguine about the possibilities of such procedure. The resolution in regard to women's suffrage revealed the fact that the war had softened bitter antagonisms and had created a more conciliatory attitude. Even *The Times*, which had been such an implacable opponent of women's suffrage, announced that this was one of the changes which was inherent in the circumstances of the war.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 1, 1917, p. 7.

*Resolutions of Conference Presented to Commons*

After the report had been made public the Government decided that it ought to be presented to the House for discussion in the form of a resolution. Accordingly on March 28, 1917 Mr. Asquith, by whom the Conference had been instigated, moved, "That this House records its thanks to Mr. Speaker for his services in presiding over the Electoral Reform Conference, and is of the opinion that legislation should promptly be introduced on the lines of the resolutions reported from the Conference."<sup>1</sup> In introducing this motion Mr. Asquith reviewed the situation in its relation to Parliament, the acts which had been passed to prolong it, the antiquated condition of the register, the futile attempts which had been made to constitute a new register, and the necessity which the war had produced of enabling the electors in national service to cast their votes. His most significant statement was the announcement of his support to the cause of women's suffrage. "I think that some years ago I ventured to use the expression, 'Let the women work out their own salvation.' Well sir, they have worked it out during the war." He then proceeded to eulogize the great service which they had rendered to the nation during the war and the necessity for their having a voice in the great problems of reconstruction. To his mind this could now be done with dignity, for there had not been for nearly three years a recurrence of "that detestable campaign which disfigured the annals of political agitation in this country and so no one can now contend that we are yielding to violence." The whole subject of franchise reform could now be approached in an entirely different atmosphere from that of the pre-war days and under much more auspicious circumstances than had ever prevailed be-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 92: 462-71.

fore in the annals of English franchise legislation. The report was supported not only by the Government but also by Mr. Asquith, now the leader of the Opposition.

That all the opponents of women's suffrage would not meekly acquiesce was very soon made clear by the speech of Mr. Arnold Ward. He warned the Government that if this proposition were included, the opponents of women's suffrage would fight it to the bitter end with all of their powers.<sup>1</sup> While there might fairly be a condition of give and take in regard to registration, redistribution, and plural voting, there could be no such attitude adopted towards the question of women's suffrage.

Mr. Salter, supported by fifty-two other Unionists, attempted to defeat the proposal by a motion which demanded that the Government should undertake immediately to place all soldiers and sailors on the register and make provisions for absent voting. Other than this they demanded that the whole attention of Parliament be devoted to the prosecution of the war.<sup>2</sup> They contended that this was an inopportune time to begin consideration of this highly controversial subject. They were consistent in their attitude, for they said that if soldiers and sailors could not be placed on the register without raising the whole franchise question, then even that should be postponed until the end of the war. This motion was defeated by an overwhelming majority.

At the close of the debate Mr. Asquith's motion carried by the vote of 341 ayes to 62 noes, a majority of 279. The 62 in opposition were all members of the Unionist party. It was evident that the national service which women had rendered the state had caused a great change of public opinion in their favor. The overwhelming majority given the reso-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 92: 496-500.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 471-82.

lution was indicative of the feeling of the House in regard to franchise reform. It was also the general feeling that it was time to get this question settled while it could be undertaken from the nonpartisan standpoint and to get it out of the way of the reconstruction work which lay ahead of Parliament. So favorable was the discussion toward the report that at its close Mr. Bonar Law announced that the Government would introduce a bill on the agreed lines.

*Representation of the People Bill of 1917*

The Government lost no time in carrying out the mandate of the House and the next day ordered the drafting of a bill based upon the report of the Conference. In doing this it proceeded along the same nonpartisan lines that had been followed in the Conference. The bill was introduced for a first reading on May 15, by Mr. Long, Secretary of State for the Colonies.<sup>1</sup> The policy of the Government was simply to embody, in the form of a bill, the resolutions which had been adopted by the House. There were two important exceptions to this. The questions of proportional representation and of women's suffrage were left to the House for acceptance or rejection and the Government agreed to abide by its decision.

The revolutionary character of the bill was shown by the fact that it proposed wholly to repeal thirty-one existing statutes dealing with franchise and registration questions and to repeal parts of thirty-two others. It abolished all the old and complicated franchise laws and substituted therefor a simple franchise system. The effect upon the electorate was far greater than that of any previous franchise reform bill. The Reform Bill of 1832 increased the electorate by 217,386 or 49 per cent. The Reform Bill of 1867 added 938,427 votes or 88 per cent, while that of

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 93: 1492-7.



1884 enfranchised 1,762,087 or an increase of 67 per cent.<sup>1</sup> In 1915 there were 8,357,000 electors. This bill proposed to add about 2,000,000 men and about 6,000,000 women voters. The electorate would be thus almost doubled in size at one stroke.

Colonel Sanders led the opposition to the bill<sup>2</sup> and was supported by Mr. Burdett-Coutts, Colonel Gretton, Sir George Reid, and Mr. Nield. As was to be expected the women's suffrage question played an important part in the debate. Mr. Sanders opposed the bill because the Government did not pledge its support to women's suffrage, while Mr. Burdett-Coutts opposed it because women's suffrage was included. Mr. Ward insisted that the question of women's suffrage be separated from the rest of the bill and that it be decided by a referendum to the country.<sup>3</sup> On division the bill passed a second reading by the vote of 329 to 40, every vote in the opposition being from the Unionist party. The debate was characterized by a remarkable spirit of conciliation and compromise, the question of women's suffrage being the only point over which there was the old spirit of antagonism and even here this spirit was shown by only one or two speakers.

When the bill came up on the committee stage on June 6, the first move of the opponents was to attempt to separate women's suffrage from the bill and make it a separate measure, but this was ruled out of order by the Speaker.<sup>4</sup> Another attempt along this line was made by Sir Frederick Banbury who moved to instruct the committee to divide the bill, one part to deal with redistribution of seats and the other with parliamentary and local franchise.<sup>5</sup> He maintained that it

<sup>1</sup> Seymour, *Electoral Reforms in England and Wales*, p. 533.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 93: 2144-56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 94: 2424-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-7.

was impossible adequately to discuss these two questions in one bill, and that neither the House nor the country knew anything about the effect which the instructions given to the Boundary Commission, which was already at work, would have upon the constituencies. He was supported in his contention by Mr. McNeill, who although a supporter of the bill urged that the House ought to have opportunity to debate the instructions given the Boundary Commission. He thought that the agricultural districts were in danger of being deprived of adequate representation. While Mr. Cave, Secretary of State for the Home Department, opposed this motion and maintained that it would accomplish no useful purpose, he did promise that the House would be given opportunity to debate the instructions which had been given to the Boundary Commission. With this assurance the motion of Mr. Banbury was lost. This was really a concession to the agricultural interests.

#### *Parliamentary Franchise for Men*

The first section of the bill, which dealt with the qualifications for the parliamentary franchise for men, was one of its most revolutionary provisions. Heretofore, as has been pointed out, when franchise reform bills had been enacted the Government had left most of the old qualifications intact and had simply created new qualifications or extended the old ones. This process resulted in a franchise system full of complications, inequalities, and anomalies which were wholly indefensible and led to an enormous amount of litigation in order to establish franchise rights under the conflicting and complicated laws. The Conference decided to repeal this mass of laws entirely. The two chief qualifications retained were residence and business premises. According to the provisions of the bill any man twenty-one years of age was entitled to be registered as a parliamentary

elector, in respect of residence qualifications, if he occupied a residence.<sup>1</sup> The rating of premises, or payment of rates, or the value of the premises played no part in the qualifications. This would enable a great many men to qualify for the franchise who could not do so under the existing laws. It would, for example, permit the registration of sons living at home with their parents. The one requirement placed upon the business premises qualification was that it be of £10 yearly value and be occupied for the purpose of business, profession, or trade. The old requirement of rating or payment of rates was eliminated, but business premises must be actually occupied in the capacity of ownership or tenancy.

In order to have either the requisite residence or business premises qualifications an elector must have resided or occupied premises for the whole of the qualifying period in a constituency, in the same parliamentary borough or county or in a contiguous parliamentary borough or county. This was a great extension of the principle of successive occupation which previously had been possible only within one borough or one parliamentary division of a county.<sup>2</sup> The bill also provided that the county of London should be treated as one borough, which meant that a voter might move from one part of London to any other part or into any parliamentary borough or county adjoining London and be entitled to be registered as a successive occupation voter.

After several minor amendments had been offered and either withdrawn or defeated Sir F. Banbury made an at-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1917, Bill 49.

<sup>2</sup> The law of successive occupation provided that a voter in a parliamentary borough or county could change his residence to another part of the borough or county, even though a different division of a parliamentary borough, and it would have the same effect in qualifying the voter as a continued occupation in the same premises. *Representation of People Act*, 1867 (30 & 31 Vict., c. 102), s. 26.

tempt to reintroduce the ownership qualification on the basis of ownership of land or premises of the annual value of £5 or upwards.<sup>1</sup> He argued that this was the oldest of English franchise qualifications and that it was unfair to the owners of small holdings to be deprived of their votes; they had just as much interest in the country as the man with a small business premises of £10 annual value. This raised the whole question of plural voting. Colonel R. Williams and Sir J. Simon, both members of the Conference, objected to the reintroduction of the ownership qualification into the franchise law. It was brought out that the ownership qualification had been eliminated by the Conference on a compromise. It had been considered in connection with plural voting and university representation and these, they maintained, would never have been agreed to had the ownership vote been retained. The amendment failed by vote of 35 to 228.

Another attempt was made by Sir F. Banbury to preserve the parliamentary constituencies in the County of London as they had existed. The bill abolished these twenty-eight constituencies and made the County of London one parliamentary borough. This had been a source of much contention between the Liberals and the Unionists for years. Sir F. Banbury raised the old question and presented the old argument that the City of London was not a single city but an agglomeration of cities which deserved special treatment.<sup>2</sup> The Government refused to enter into the old controversy. After a short discussion the amendment was defeated and the Liberals from a party standpoint won a victory.

The clause which defined business premises did not include land used for business purposes, such as gardening,

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 219-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 419-20.



within the meaning of the term. An amendment to this effect was introduced and accepted by the Government on the principle that it wanted to give as broad an interpretation as possible to business premises. As a result of this a market gardener occupying land for his business would be entitled to be registered in respect of business occupancy while a person occupying a piece of land to grow vegetables for his own consumption or for pleasure would not be entitled to be registered for such occupancy.

The first clause of the bill was adopted by the remarkable vote of 184 to 14. While there was not a very full House the opposition of 14 votes was a very feeble protest against the simple qualifications of residence and business premises as proposed by the bill.

#### *University Franchise for Men*

The third basis for the franchise qualification as provided by the bill was that of university representation. This extended the right to register as a parliamentary elector to all male graduates, of full age, of universities which formed a whole or part of a university constituency. The opposition to this form of representation practically disappeared with the limitation on plural voting, and there was no discussion on the general principle of university representation. In fact, the clause was agreed to without division. This was a great extension of the franchise to the educated classes. Prior to the act only male graduates of Oxford, Cambridge, London, Dublin, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and Edinburgh and St. Andrews were entitled to register. This act extended this privilege to graduates of Durham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, Bristol, and Wales. By the Irish Redistribution Bill Queen's University of Belfast and the National University of Ireland were also granted representation, making a total of fifteen

university representatives. Seemingly this was a victory for the Conservatives although it was deprived of much of its advantage by the limitation on plural voting. In reality it was a victory for the more democratic forces in the younger universities.

### *Local Government Franchise for Men*

The qualifications for local government franchise caused a great deal of discussion because of the fact that the women's suffrage franchise was based upon the local government franchise. The bill as introduced provided that any man of full age was entitled to be registered as a local government elector if he occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises in a local government electoral area. He must, however, have occupied this during the whole of the qualifying period. This greatly simplified the position of the local government elector. Formerly one set of electors voted for town or county councils while others were entitled to vote for parish or district councils.<sup>1</sup> This abolished all of these old qualifications and made one qualification for all local government purposes. It was virtually an occupation qualification, for the one condition was that the voter must actually occupy the land or premises as either owner or tenant. The qualifications did not depend in any way upon the value, rating or payment of rates upon the land or premises. There were no limitations placed upon the use of the land or premises by the owner or occupier as formerly or as in the case of the parliamentary occupation qualification. The bill as introduced excluded all lodgers from the right to register as local government electors. This feature was especially objectionable to London because there the lodgers occupying furnished or unfurnished apartments of

<sup>1</sup> *Municipal Corporations Act*, 1882 (45 & 46 Vict., c. 50) ss. 9, 11, 51; *Local Government Act*, 1894 (56 & 57 Vict., c. 73) ss. 2, 3, 23, 43.

£10 annual value were entitled to be registered as local government electors.

Mr. Adamson introduced an amendment to this clause which would place the local government franchise on the same basis as the parliamentary franchise.<sup>1</sup> He argued that this clause as drafted would disfranchise the lodgers in London. Sir G. Cave defending the clause and speaking for the Government replied that there was an entirely different basis for the two franchises. The right of registration in the parliamentary franchise was granted to all residents and occupiers of business premises. But in the case of the local government, the local rates were paid by the occupiers or owners and they should have the right to vote these rates; the voting of rates should not be left to the residents. On this ground the Government refused to accept the amendment. This did not settle the matter, for Mr. Dickinson moved an amendment to make a distinction between lodgers who occupied furnished and those who occupied unfurnished rooms.<sup>2</sup> He estimated that there were in London about 108,000 parliamentary voters on the lodger list who by the bill would be disfranchised from the local government vote. Of these about 65,000 occupied unfurnished lodgings and 43,000 occupied furnished lodgings. His amendment provided that the term tenant should include all lodgers who rented a room or rooms in an unfurnished state.<sup>3</sup> The Government recognized the legitimacy of the claim and yielding to the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 1513-14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1529-31.

<sup>3</sup> A great deal of litigation has been necessary to establish the distinction between the occupier and the lodger. The general principle is that an occupier is one who occupies a whole or a part of a house entirely separate and independent from the landlord, while in the case of the lodger the landlord still exercises some control over the premises. Halsbury, *The Laws of England*, vol. xii, pp. 168-9.

strong pressure from the London members, granted this compromise. According to the amendment all occupiers of unfurnished rooms regardless of value were granted the right to register as local government electors. The lodgers of furnished rooms were not granted the right to register, yet it greatly increased the total number of local government electors in London, because heretofore all those occupying rooms below £10 rent had been debarred from the right to vote.

During the report stage a clause was added which extended the local government franchise to the service voters. It provided that a man who himself inhabited any dwelling house by virtue of any office, service, or employment, should if the dwelling house was not inhabited by the person in whose services he was employed, be deemed to occupy the dwelling house as a tenant.<sup>1</sup> By the Act of 1884 a man who inhabited a dwelling house, by reason of service, in which his employer did not reside, was granted the parliamentary franchise. This act now extended to these service voters, for the first time, the local government franchise. This conferred the local government franchise upon a large number of men holding responsible positions such as bank managers, schoolmasters, managers of large businesses, shop assistants, and others who occupy separate rooms on their employer's premises.<sup>2</sup>

According to the bill as finally adopted the local government franchise was made uniform and was granted to all those who occupied land or premises as owners or tenants. In this connection the term tenant was to include lodgers who rented unfurnished rooms and service voters.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 99: 678-80.

<sup>2</sup> Seager, *The Reform Act of 1918*, p. 39.



*Women's Suffrage*

When the question of women's suffrage came up for consideration Sir F. Banbury moved an amendment which virtually eliminated this provision from the bill.<sup>1</sup> As the Government had announced that there would be a free vote upon women's suffrage this introduced the whole matter before the House for disposition. He argued that the House fresh from an election had defeated a women's suffrage bill in 1912 and 1913 and this was a very inopportune time for a House which had already outlived its legal period by eighteen months to deal with this question.

It was apparent that the change of position of Mr. Asquith on the question of women's suffrage, because of the services of women during the war, led to many other similar decisions which made very serious inroads upon the anti-suffrage forces. Sir F. E. Smith, Attorney-General, who had been one of the strongest opponents of women's suffrage, announced his decision to support the provision.<sup>2</sup> This was due to the fact that the bill contained so many provisions he heartily approved; in order to insure the adoption of these reforms and in order to dispose of the other highly contentious questions, of which he did not approve, he agreed to support the bill as a whole. A great many others found themselves in exactly the same position and when they had to choose between accepting women's suffrage or rejecting the whole bill they did not hesitate to support the whole measure.

The closing speech in the long fight against the inevitable movement towards women's suffrage was made by Mr. Ward.<sup>3</sup> He argued that regardless of whether or not the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 1640-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1670-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1738-48.

war had altered the position of women this was not the time to settle the question when there were millions of electors at the front and when a large number of members of the House were absent. This was especially true when the House had three times prolonged its own life and a solemn political truce had been entered into. He demanded that the question of women's suffrage be separated from the rest of the bill so a straight vote could be taken on this one issue. On division the retention of the women's suffrage clause as part of the bill was carried by the vote of 385 to 55, the largest majority ever given to a women's suffrage measure.<sup>1</sup> This was the more remarkable because it was not a Government clause but was left to the House to decide. It was generally admitted before the debate that the women's suffrage clause would be retained in the bill so those who protested against it most vigorously realized they were defending a lost cause. The debate was well characterized by Mr. G. Thorne when he said, "What is manifest in this debate is its apparent dullness. That is its most hopeful characteristic, for the fight is out of the whole struggle. It is absolutely clear that the fight is won."<sup>2</sup> It was the consensus of opinion that the conduct of women during the war had won for them the franchise and it was mentioned in one form or another in almost every speech.

<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the votes shows that some of the Liberals still refused to change their course and voted with the minority.

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Liberals .....	184	12
Unionists .....	141	45
Labor .....	29	
Nationalists .....	33	
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	387	57

This included the Tellers. *The Times*, June 21, 1917, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 1716.

*Franchise Qualifications for Women*

As soon as it had been definitely decided that some form of women's suffrage would be granted, the next question that arose was as to its basis. The bill, as introduced, provided that a woman would be entitled to register as a parliamentary elector if she were thirty years of age, and not subject to any legal incapacity, and entitled to be registered as a local government elector in respect of land or premises or were the wife of a husband who was entitled to be so registered. The university franchise was also extended to women who were thirty years of age on the same conditions as for men. The local government franchise was extended to women on the same basis as it was to men except that a husband and wife could not qualify as local government electors in respect of the same property. This provision really acted as a disfranchising clause to married women who lived with their husbands, granting the local franchise only to widows and spinsters. The age limit was twenty-one years, the same as for men.

The first move by the anti-suffrage forces to defeat women's suffrage on the discussion of its provisions was a motion by Mr. Peto to strike out the thirty-years age limitation.<sup>1</sup> He maintained that this was an arbitrary and and illogical limit; that it was mainly the women under thirty years of age who had been engaged in war work and it was they who would be most vitally affected by industrial reconstruction. In the discussion it was brought out by Mr. Dickinson, who was a member of the Conference, that this age limit had been agreed upon as a compromise.<sup>2</sup> Among the members there were those who favored adult suffrage which would have enfranchised between 12,000,000 and 14,000,000 women. Since this would give the women

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 1812-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1816-21.

electors a decided majority it was not considered seriously. The Conference finally agreed upon the enfranchisement of between 5,000,000 and 6,000,000 women. In any plan it was necessary that all classes be included. There were about 7,000,000 women over forty years of age and 10,000,000 over thirty years; it was evident that age limit alone would not be an acceptable basis. It was finally decided, therefore, to grant the parliamentary franchise to women, thirty years of age, who possessed the local government franchise qualifications or were the wives of husbands possessing the local government franchise. This plan had the advantage of including all classes in the community and also married women, and yet keeping the women electors in the minority. This scheme would not enfranchise servants, maids, daughters living at home, and other women in similar position in the family, but the vote would go to the head woman of the household. Since the women's suffrage clause had carried by such a large majority, the Government now insisted that the age limit of thirty years be retained in the bill, especially since the attempt to reduce this requirement was backed only by the opponents of women's suffrage. While there was some criticism of this position of the Government, it refused to make any concessions and the amendment failed.

Another attempt was made by Mr. Peto to limit the scope of the bill by striking out the clause which granted the franchise to the wife of a husband entitled to the local government franchise. The omission of this clause would virtually have excluded married women and granted the vote to spinsters, widows, and a few others having business occupation; it would have included only about 1,000,000 women.<sup>1</sup> He argued that this was a much more conservative step and would give the vote to women who had to

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 1870-2.



make their own living. This endeavor to enfranchise only unmarried women met with very little encouragement in the House and the amendment was defeated.

The bill as introduced based the parliamentary franchise for women upon the local government franchise. Since there was no valuation qualification for the local government franchise this gave women a decided advantage over men in reference to the occupation qualification in parliamentary elections, which for men must be of not less than £10 yearly value. In order to remedy this discrepancy an amendment was later adopted by the Lords and accepted by the House which provided that the premises (not being a dwelling house) occupied by a woman as occupier or tenant, must be of not less than £5 yearly value.<sup>1</sup> This still gave women a slight advantage over men in the occupation qualification, but any higher valuation would have reduced too greatly the number of women electors.

The House of Lords also made a slight concession, which was adopted by the Commons, to women who had attended universities that did not grant degrees to women. If they had passed the final examination and had fulfilled the conditions as to residence necessary for a man to obtain a degree, then they were entitled to be registered as parliamentary electors for the university constituency.<sup>2</sup>

The bill as drafted made a distinct difference between the parliamentary and the local government franchise. For parliamentary purposes the wife of a husband who possessed the local government vote would have the parliamentary vote; but for the local government franchise the husband and wife could not both qualify in respect of the same property. This would exclude about 5,000,000 married women from the local government franchise who were entitled to the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 27: 1192-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1194-8.

parliamentary franchise. Mr. C. Roberts moved to amend this clause so as to extend the local government franchise to wives whose husbands were local government electors.<sup>1</sup> This amendment was urged on the ground that there was no reason why women should be invested with the highest imperial responsibility and at the same time prohibited from taking part in the affairs of the local government under which they lived. The Government refused to accept this amendment because the real purpose of the Conference and the bill was to deal with the question of parliamentary franchise. In spite of the position of the Government there was a very general support of this amendment, but it was withdrawn by Mr. Roberts in the hope that the Government would later consider the proposition.

On November 15, when the report stage of the women's suffrage section was under consideration the question of prohibiting married women from being local government electors was again raised. In the meantime there had been a great deal of agitation upon the question by the women and by the supporters of women's suffrage in all parts of the country. They demanded that this illogical provision be changed and that the municipal franchise be extended to women on the same basis as the parliamentary franchise. Mr. Acland moved an amendment which provided that a woman should be entitled to register as a local government elector when she was the wife of a man entitled to be so registered.<sup>2</sup> This would entirely remove the disability from married women and place them upon an equal basis with men even as to age. Sir G. Cave again refused to accept the amendment on the principle that it ran counter to the proposal made by the Speaker's Confer-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 1882-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 99: 691-8.

ence and especially because with no age limitation the women would entirely outnumber the male local government electors.

This did not satisfy the supporters of the amendment and they appealed to the Government to leave the question open for the House to decide as the women's suffrage issue had been left. When the House resumed the consideration of the clause on November 20, appeals were made on all sides, from the opponents of parliamentary women's suffrage, as well as its supporters, for the Government to leave this question open for decision by the House. To this overwhelming demand the Government agreed with the understanding that the age limit be placed at thirty years. This had already been agreed to by the supporters of the amendment and in this form it was incorporated in the clause and accepted without even a division. Surely this was a complete victory for the women's cause.

The bill as finally adopted, therefore, granted the parliamentary franchise to all women above the age of thirty years (not subject to any legal incapacity) who occupied as owners or tenants any land or premises in a constituency. The premises, with the exception of dwelling houses, must be of £5 yearly value. In the case of joint occupiers the value of the qualifying property must be equal to £5 to each joint woman occupier. The franchise was also extended to the wives (thirty years of age) of all husbands who were entitled to be registered as local government electors. The university franchise was extended to all women graduates or those who had fulfilled the qualifications for graduation, thirty years of age, on practically the same basis as men. It was estimated that this would extend the parliamentary franchise to a total of about 6,000,000 women. The local government franchise was extended to all women above twenty-one years of age on the same

basis as men. It also provided that a wife and her husband could qualify in respect of the same residence provided she was thirty years of age.

*Special Provisions for Persons in War Service*

The demand that soldiers and sailors be placed on the register regardless of their qualifications was one of the issues which had precipitated the discussion concerning franchise reform and had made some action imperative. The bill as introduced provided that during the war and for twelve months afterwards any person would be entitled to be registered as a parliamentary elector in any constituency provided he would have had the necessary qualifications but for the interruption of the war. It provided that the statement, made in the proper form, of any one claiming to be so registered was sufficient. A liberal interpretation was given to this section and applied to all so-called "naval or military voters," that is to any person abroad who was a member of the naval or military forces of the Crown or in service of a naval or military character for which payment was made out of money provided by Parliament or who was serving in any work of the British Red Cross Society, or the St. John Ambulance Association, or any other organization with a similar object. This was later amended so as to include also those in service as merchant seamen, pilots, fishermen, or any one in any way connected with work recognized by the Admiralty, Army Council, or Air Council as work of national importance in connection with the war.

There had been a great deal of criticism concerning this section because some of the members felt that the Government had attempted to limit and restrict the soldier and sailor vote and also because it was limited in its duration to twelve months after the termination of the war. To meet this criticism the Government introduced an amendment



which provided that any soldier or sailor on full pay in either military or naval forces would be entitled to be registered as a parliamentary elector. This was not limited to the duration of the war.<sup>1</sup>

An attempt was made immediately to amend this so as to reduce the age qualification from twenty-one to nineteen years on the principle that those who had faced the dangers at the front for their country ought also to enjoy the right to vote. This was opposed by Sir G. Cave; he maintained that it went beyond the purpose of the clause which was simply to prevent any soldier or sailor, who was otherwise entitled to the vote, from losing his vote because of his being in the service of the Crown. It was also pointed out by Mr. Gladstone that this would give rise to injustice to women below the age of twenty-one and thirty-one who were engaged in the service of the country. Because of the strong demand for this change the Government promised to consider it before the 'report stage. At that time the age limit of nineteen years was accepted without division for all male naval and military voters.

These provisions were adopted as a permanent policy of the Government and applied to peace times as well as to any future wars and to all naval and military voters serving at home or abroad. In case the naval or military voter had had an occupation vote for business premises but had lost it owing to the war, he was entitled to be registered for it even though he no longer possessed the qualifications. These provisions applied to men and women alike except that the age qualification for the men was nineteen years and for women thirty years. These special provisions did not apply to the great class of munition workers. They moved in great numbers from their homes to munition centers and

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 95: 59-60.

many of them were unable to register because of residence qualifications. This class of war workers was given no special consideration.

### *Qualifying Period*

The length of the qualifying period which was twelve months had caused a great deal of discussion and many bills had been introduced attempting to shorten it. Under the old conditions it took at least eighteen months to get on the register and often as much as two and one-half years elapsed before a man could vote.<sup>1</sup> This worked a special hardship upon the laboring and poorer classes that moved frequently; hence thousands were disfranchised because of the qualifying requirement.

The bill reduced the qualifying period to six months ending either on January 15, or July 15. This was the result of a compromise in the Conference between the more conservative, who wanted to retain the twelve months, and the more radical, who wanted only a three months qualifying period. The bill also provided that in case of naval or military voters who ceased to serve during the qualifying period, one month would be substituted for six months as the qualifying period. Another section was later introduced in the bill to prevent a person from moving into a new constituency on the last day of the qualifying period and getting on the register immediately as a "swallow voter." In order to deal with this situation a compromise was reached by providing that if a man moved into a constituency within thirty days before the registration period, and an objection was taken against him, the test as to whether he was a *bona fide* elector would be whether he had continued to reside there thirty days after beginning his residence. If so he was entitled to register, otherwise he was not so entitled.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, pp. 10-11.

The shorter qualifying period was accepted with little opposition.

### *The Question of Plural Voting*

As has been seen in the previous chapters the demand for the abolition of plural voting was one of the chief causes of the agitation for franchise reform. The section as introduced in the bill relating to the rights of registered persons to vote provided that a man registered as a parliamentary elector could vote in only one constituency under a residence qualification, and in not more than one constituency by virtue of any other qualification. This abolished the plural vote but permitted the dual vote. It limited the right, however, of the voter to one vote, unless he were also registered in another constituency in respect of occupation or university qualifications, in which case he might vote in two constituencies.

This clause raised another point which engendered a great deal of party spirit before it was finally settled. The Redistribution Act of 1885 prohibited an elector from voting in more than one division of a parliamentary borough at a general election.<sup>1</sup> This abolished plural voting within any single parliamentary borough. The bill as introduced repealed this section of the Act of 1885 and simply restricted the elector to a vote in not more than two constituencies. Although plural voting was entirely abolished (as it had been abolished within the parliamentary boroughs since 1885) the bill now permitted the dual vote even within the parliamentary boroughs. The effect of this, however, was greatly limited by the incorporation in the bill of the principle of proportional representation. This meant that boroughs having three, four or five members would still be

<sup>1</sup> *The Redistribution of Seats Act, 1885* (48 & 49 Vict., c. 23) s. 8.

single constituencies, without divisions, and the dual vote could not be exercised even though permitted by the bill. It could be exercised only where the borough was large enough to be separated into divisions having in each case five members. Even in a large borough with fifteen members there would be only three divisions.

The Instructions to the Boundary Commission to work as though proportional representation had been eliminated from the bill, entirely changed this situation.<sup>1</sup> If the principle of proportional representation were adopted there would be a large number of multiple member divisions in the boroughs; if it were stricken out, there would remain only single member divisions which would greatly increase the importance of the dual vote. Mr. Harris, therefore, moved an amendment which provided that an elector could not vote in more than one division of a parliamentary borough at a general election. The amendment was withdrawn on the understanding that it would be taken up again after proportional representation had been definitely settled. On the report stage, after proportional representation had been definitely rejected, this much mooted point was again raised by Mr. G. Thorne, who introduced an amendment providing that in case proportional representation were not reintroduced in the bill an elector could not vote at a general election in more than one division of a parliamentary borough.<sup>2</sup> This gave rise to a heated debate as to what actually happened at the Speaker's Conference. The supporters of the amendment and the oppon-

<sup>1</sup>Proportional representation had been included in the bill, but when the debate on the Instructions to the Boundary Commission took place on June 12, the vote was passed that the Commission work on the assumption that proportional representation was not a part of the bill. *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 860.

<sup>2</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 99: 1086-89.



ents of plural voting maintained that they had agreed to the repeal of this section in the Act of 1885 only on the condition that proportional representation would be incorporated in the bill. Since this had now been stricken from the bill they maintained that the compromise had been broken and the limitation ought to be reintroduced. With proportional representation in the bill only 15 seats were affected, but with it eliminated and with the schedule of redistribution, there were 213 seats affected.

The defenders of plural voting maintained that the adoption of proportional representation was in no way dependent upon the dual vote and that no such compromise was entered into; they contended that the retention of the dual vote was part of the compromise over the complete abolition of the plural vote. The Government was asked to leave this an open question for the House to determine; but it refused and the amendment was lost. In the Lords an attempt was made to make a similar amendment, but there it also failed. The clause remained as introduced and the dual vote was permitted to be exercised in the parliamentary boroughs.

By its terms the bill simply limited women to two votes in different constituencies and placed no restrictions upon voting twice under the same qualification. This gave women more latitude than men. As soon as the clause came up for discussion an amendment was introduced which provided that no person could vote at a general election in more than two constituencies. The Government refused to accept this as contrary to the principle of the bill because it introduced a degree of plural voting in that it would permit a man to vote twice on the same qualification.<sup>1</sup> They recognized, however, that the bill violated this principle in relation to women and the Government proposed an

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 95: 247.

amendment which was adopted. This amendment provided that a woman could not vote in more than one constituency for which she was registered by virtue of her own or her husband's local government qualifications, or for more than one other constituency for which she might otherwise qualify. That is, the only way in which a woman could qualify for a dual vote was to possess a university vote in addition either to residence or business premises qualification.

The bill as finally agreed upon resulted in a compromise over plural voting. While the Liberals obtained the abolition of unrestricted plural voting they were, as a concession to the Conservatives, forced to retain the dual vote even within the parliamentary boroughs. The voter was entitled to one vote by reason of his residence and one other vote in case he was registered either for business premises or as a university voter. But these qualifications must be in different parliamentary divisions; otherwise he could cast only one vote. If a voter had a residential vote in one division of a borough and a business vote in another division of the same borough, then he would be entitled to two votes. A woman registered under a residence or business premises qualification could obtain a second vote only by being registered under a university qualification. At a by-election a voter could vote in any constituency where he was registered as an elector.

In regard to local government the bill provided that an elector could vote in only one ward or division of a local government area at a general local election. But the right to vote in any ward at a local by-election was preserved. An attempt was made to permit the dual vote to be exercised in the local government elections just as in parliamentary elections, but this was unsuccessful.

*Provisions as to Disqualifications*

The bill as proposed retained most of the old poor law disqualifications. It prohibited a person from voting if he had received poor relief, other than medical relief, or other alms for an aggregate of thirty days during the qualifying period. As soon as the section was introduced Mr. Whitehouse moved to strike out this disqualifying provision.<sup>1</sup> During the course of the debate the injustices of this provision were pointed out, and testimony was given to show that it in no way deterred people from seeking poor relief. It was emphasized that the war would make this provision a special hardship upon many old people and particularly upon women who had been deprived of their support. Because of the strong opposition from all parts of the House the Government agreed to make concessions and to introduce a remedial amendment. The amendment, which was agreed to, provided that, "A person should not be disqualified from being registered or from voting as a parliamentary or local government elector by reason that he or some person for whose maintenance he is responsible has received poor relief or other alms."

The points causing the greatest discussion concerning disqualification were those growing out of the war. Mr. R. McNeill introduced an amendment to exclude from voting privileges all persons who had been exempted from military service on account of conscientious objections.<sup>2</sup> This proposition brought forth a great deal of protest, although all of those who spoke against it declared they had no sympathy whatever with the views held by the conscientious objectors. The opposition was based on broad lines of policy. Lord H. Cecil made an eloquent speech

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 95:282-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 307-15.

against the amendment on the principle of toleration towards religious convictions and freedom of individual conscience.<sup>1</sup> Sir J. Simon in opposing the amendment argued that it was a most untenable proposition for Parliament to grant exemption under the Military Service Act and afterward to inflict the penalty of disfranchisement upon those who availed themselves of this privilege.<sup>2</sup> He declared: "Once you lay it down that some people are to be deprived of their votes because of the opinions they express and act upon, you are taking a backward step in our institutions, the seriousness of which can hardly be measured. . . . It would be a very evil day for the history of freedom in this country if we ever penalized any opinions, however absurd, in the matter of voting."

Sir G. Cave, while expressing great personal sympathy with the purpose of the amendment, insisted that the Government had to look at the amendment from the standpoint of the success of the bill. Since this was a very contentious provision the Government refused to imperil the final passage of the bill by its consideration. He also pointed out the injustice of the provision in connection with voters who, while they had claimed exemption from military service, had nevertheless not shrunk from danger but had risked their lives for the state and had rendered most valuable service to their country in many ways. With this pressure from the Government the amendment failed by a vote of 71 to 17.<sup>3</sup> A further amendment was adopted which disqualified all but British subjects from the parliamentary or local government franchise.

Under the existing law paid election agents, messengers,

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 95: 315-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 323-8.

<sup>3</sup> For passage of this amendment on report stage, *cf. infra*, pp. 182-5.



clerks, and polling agents engaged in election were prohibited from voting at the election because of their paid services.<sup>1</sup> In the report stage an amendment was made which removed these disqualifications and provided that a person could not be disqualified from voting at either parliamentary or local government elections because he was employed for payment by a candidate, so long as the employment was legal.<sup>2</sup> Another disqualification was removed by the Lords and accepted by the Commons which provided that any incapacity of a peer to vote at an election arising from his status as a peer should not extend to peeresses in their own right.<sup>3</sup>

### *Registration*

The registration system in vogue since 1832 had been a constant source of party intrigue, excessive expense, and disfranchisement. It was the duty of the overseers of the poor in April to begin the preparation of the register from those who had paid the poor rates.<sup>4</sup> Claims to be placed upon this register and objections to names placed thereon were heard by the revising barrister in September. In practice the individual voter was relieved of this responsibility by the party agents who were very energetic in getting the register revised in the party interest. The register thus compiled went into effect on January 1 and continued for one year.

The proposed bill abolished all of this old cumbrous and intricate machinery and substituted a simple direct system. It provided that there should be a spring and an

<sup>1</sup> Anson, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 99: 1277-82.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 27: 770-1.

<sup>4</sup> Anson, *op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 134-36.

autumn register prepared each year.<sup>1</sup> The qualifying period of the spring register ended on January 15, and the register went into force on April 15. The qualifying period of the autumn register ended on July 15, and the register went into force on October 15. The duty of preparing the register and entering on it the names of all persons who under the law were entitled to vote, either as parliamentary or local government electors, was placed upon the clerk of the county council, and upon the town clerk of the borough. Thus the revising barrister and his court were entirely eliminated.

This radical change was not to be accomplished without a protest in favor of the old system. Sir F. Banbury moved an amendment which would place a check upon the registration officer by requiring a revision of the register to be made by a revising officer. He argued that such an important political matter could not safely be left to the discretion of one officer and it was necessary to have some kind of outside check upon him.<sup>2</sup> It was the chief purpose of his provision of the bill to eliminate the machinery for revision which had been made necessary by the complicated nature of the franchise laws. With the simplification of the franchise the questions to be determined would be largely questions of fact rather than of law. If the revising barristers were retained, it would mean that the whole existing party machinery would remain intact. With the weight of the Government against this amendment it was defeated.

Under the old system the revision of the register was first made by the revising barrister and then an appeal could be taken to the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court.

<sup>1</sup> It was provided that in Ireland the register be prepared only once a year.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 95: 434-5.

The bill provided that the register should be compiled by the registration officer and that appeal from his decision could be taken to the county court. Appeal could be carried from this court to the Court of Appeal. The appeal, however, could be taken to the county court only on a point of law; on a question of fact the decision of the registration officer was final. It was conceded that this placed too much power in the hands of the registration officer and the bill was so amended as to permit appeal on any question to the county court, provided the claimant or objector had first appeared before the registration officer and had been heard by him. The final appeal from the county court to the Court of Appeal was to be on points of law only.

These provisions greatly simplified the whole process of registration and placed the duty of preparing the register upon a registration officer of the government rather than leaving its preparation to party agents working in the interests of their own party. The fact that the franchise qualifications were so greatly simplified would also largely eliminate the litigation growing out of claims for registration.

### *Expenses of Registration*

Heretofore the expenses of registration were borne equally in the case of the county by the county fund and the poor rates of the parish, and in the case of the borough by the borough fund and the poor rates.<sup>1</sup> Half of the expenses of the revising barrister were borne by the Imperial Exchequer and half by the county authorities.<sup>2</sup> The bill provided that the total expense in connection with the registration should be borne in the first instance by the county or borough council. It was the duty of the Treasury

<sup>1</sup> Halsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> *County Electors Act*, 1888 (51 & 52 Vict., c. 10), s. 9.

to frame a scale of maximum expenses and if the amount expended did not exceed this the Treasury would refund to the county or borough council, from money provided by Parliament, one-half of the amount expended. If the registration officer exceeded the maximum, the question would be referred to the Local Government Board. The decision of the Board was final and unless the amount spent in excess of the maximum was sanctioned by the Board it must be borne by the county or borough council. No debate occurred on the principle of this section and only minor amendments were made.

### *Proportional Representation*

The question of proportional representation proved to be one of the most thorny problems of the whole bill; indeed at times it threatened to break up the coalition and to endanger the success of the bill. It was adopted by the Conference as a compromise measure and recommended unanimously in their report. When the report of the Conference was under consideration Mr. Lloyd George expressed his ignorance of the scheme and asserted that it was on a different basis from the other recommendations.<sup>1</sup> When the bill was introduced, although it was incorporated as part of the measure, it was with the definite understanding that it was to be left to the free vote of the House just as the question of women's suffrage was left.

The discussion of the question came up first on June 12, while the House was debating the Instructions to the Boundary Commission. After considerable discussion at that time it was finally agreed by vote of 149 to 141 that the Commission was to act on the assumption that proportional representation would not be adopted.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 92: 492.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 94: 860.



vote on these instructions shows a rather general division within the parties, although the Unionists gave a majority of 47 against proportional representation and the Liberals a majority of 23 for it, the Labor party being almost equally divided. Most of the London members voted against it.<sup>1</sup>

The question of proportional representation was brought squarely before the House by the provision in the bill that, "In a constituency returning three or more members, any election of the full number of members shall be according to the principle of proportional representation, each elector having one transferable vote as defined by this act." The rejection of the clause was moved by Mr. Montague Barlow on the principle that it would strengthen the position of the party caucus; that it would create large constituencies; and that it would increase party expenses which would give a decided advantage to the strictly party candidate.<sup>2</sup> In defense of the system it was urged that the increased cost of election could be solved by limiting the expenses of each candidate. The chief argument for the proposal was that it would permit representation of minorities and would make possible a more equitable reflection of public opinion.<sup>3</sup>

When the vote was taken that proportional representation be retained as part of the bill, it failed by vote of 169 ayes

<sup>1</sup> The parties voted as follows:

	<i>Against</i> <i>P. R.</i>	<i>For</i> <i>P. R.</i>
Liberal .....	54	77
Unionist .....	85	38
Labor .....	10	12
Irish .....		14
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	149	141

*Daily Telegraph*, June 18, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 95: 1134-40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1168-76.

to 201 noes. On the whole the debate showed that little genuine interest was taken in the subject at the time. This virtually meant the defeat of the application of proportional representation to the bill with the exception of the possibility of its being applied to the university constituencies. The Liberals still gave a majority for and the Unionists against proportional representation. The London members were again largely responsible for its defeat. Of the London Unionists 23 voted against and only 2 for it, while the London Liberals gave 13 votes in the negative and 6 in the affirmative.<sup>1</sup>

### *Alternative Voting*

After the committee had rejected the principle of proportional representation the next question considered when they resumed the discussion of the bill on August 9, was the alternative vote. The bill as originally drawn had provided for certain multiple constituencies in which proportional representation was to be used. Where the single member constituencies were retained and where there were more than two candidates, the election was to be on the principle of alternative voting. When Mr. Burdett-Coutts moved to strike out this clause, it led to a debate upon the merits of alternative voting in which many ingenious hypothetical illustrations were given.<sup>2</sup> In the main those who

<sup>1</sup> The parties voted as follows:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Unionist .....	43	137
Liberal .....	88	60
Labor .....	13	6
National .....	27	
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	171	203

This includes the Tellers. *The Times*, July 6, 1917, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 97: 607-11.

supported the principle urged that it was necessary because of the appearance of a third party as an important political factor and that in the three-cornered fights under the existing system a minority candidate was often elected. In order to prevent this they argued that both first and second choices ought to be possible in order that the minority party would not entirely throw away its vote but would still effectively influence the election. The opponents maintained that this would lead to a large increase of candidates and a complication of the issues of elections, which were evils to be avoided. Mr. Dickinson argued that since proportional representation had been defeated, it was all the more necessary that this proposal be retained. Sir G. Cave announced that the Government would permit an open vote on the question although he expressed his personal disapproval of the scheme and suggested that it ought not to be adopted until the new franchise system had been given a trial.<sup>1</sup> On division alternative voting was retained by the narrowest possible majority, ayes 125, and noes 124. It was the first partisan vote that had thus far been cast on the bill.<sup>2</sup> The Unionists were almost unanimously against this proposal because it meant that they would lose many minority seats which they had been able to retain because of the division of the more liberal forces between the Liberal, Labor, and Socialist parties.

The next type of so-called "fancy" vote to be discussed

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 97: 642-5.

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of the vote shows:

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Liberal .....	98	13
Labor .....	17	
National .....	10	
Unionist .....	2	113
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	127	126

This includes the Tellers. *The Times*, August 11, 1917, p. 7.

was in connection with the university constituencies. The bill provided that, "At a contested election of a university constituency, where there are two members to be elected, no person shall vote for more than one candidate." This applied to only three Universities, Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin, with a possibility of different treatment with regard to the latter. The university vote had been retained by the Conference on a compromise over the plural vote, but there was another point to be considered. The university vote was invariably Conservative and the Liberals insisted on this clause in the bill which would limit each elector to one vote in the larger university constituencies. The Unionists were naturally very indignant over this restriction. It meant that as a price for retaining the university vote they would lose part of the university representation which they had previously been able to elect. The rejection of the clause was moved by Sir F. Banbury.<sup>1</sup> The Government came to the support of the clause and Sir G. Cave announced that if this provision were stricken from the bill, it would mean the defeat of university representation. With this pressure on the part of the Government the provision was retained by a vote of 133 ayes to 66 noes.

The clause, however, did not entirely meet the situation for it made no provision for the method of voting in constituencies which might have three or more representatives. This was possible because it had been agreed to increase the university representation. An amendment was, therefore, introduced which provided that in a university constituency where there were two or more candidates any election of the full number must be according to the principle of proportional representation. This led again to a debate over the principle of proportional representation.<sup>2</sup> The necessity

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 97: 653-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 673-700.



of providing a method of voting for the larger university constituencies, and the feeling that proportional representation should not be entirely eliminated from the provisions of the bill, together with the desire for an experiment with proportional representation of limited scope, caused greater unity of action and the amendment was agreed to without division. As the bill passed the committee the principle of the alternative vote had been adopted for single member constituencies and proportional representation had been retained only as applied to university constituencies with two or more candidates. This did not dispose of the question; later it threatened the success of the whole bill.<sup>1</sup>

*Polls to be held on one day at a General Election*

Under the existing system the excitement of English elections extended over a period of from one to three weeks. Great latitude was given to the returning officers in regard to fixing days. With certain limitations they chose the dates for giving notice of election, and they fixed the dates for nominations and the day of the poll.<sup>2</sup> This holding of elections on different days was bound up with the controversy of plural voting. If the plural voter were able to exercise all his votes he must obviously have sufficient time to do so. It had also been of great electioneering value to the party that happened to be successful in the first polls of election. With the abolition of the plural vote, even though the dual vote was retained, the argument for the old system was largely gone.

According to the bill all the polls in case of a general election were to be held on the same day. The day for

<sup>1</sup> The further stages are not discussed at this point because of the complications which arose before it came up again. Cf. *infra*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Anson, *op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 137-9.

nominations was fixed as the eighth day after the date of the Royal proclamation declaring the calling of the Parliament, and the polls, if necessary, were to take place on the ninth day after the date of nomination. The rejection of this proposal was moved by Sir F. Banbury on the grounds that it would be a severe test upon the police to preserve order at all the polls on the same day, and since only the dual vote was retained an elector ought to have the opportunity of casting both votes.<sup>1</sup> Sir G. Cave was inclined to make some concessions on this point, but he met with such vigorous opposition from the House that he withdrew his suggestion and the provisions of the bill were accepted as introduced. Another clause was later inserted which provided that in by-elections the returning officer might fix the date for the poll not less than four days nor more than eight days after the day fixed for nomination. A great many bills had been introduced into Parliament attempting to bring about the single-day election reform. As embodied in this bill it passed with very little opposition. In operation it will greatly reduce the tension and excitement of the general election period.

### *Penalty for Illegal Voting*

The bill provided that at a general election if a person voted for more constituencies than he was entitled to vote for or even asked for a ballot or voting paper for the purpose of voting, he would be guilty of illegal practice, for which, according to the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act of 1883, the penalty was a fine of £100 and deprivation of the right to vote for five years. There was no general discussion upon this section and it was adopted with only a slight modification.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 97: 713-4.

*Voting by Absent Electors*

An entirely new feature of English election procedure was involved in the attempt to establish a system whereby absent electors could vote. The agitation to enable soldiers and sailors to vote during the war had precipitated the whole franchise question.<sup>1</sup> In order to meet this situation the bill provided that electors could be placed on the absent voters list,<sup>2</sup> who by reason of their occupation, service, or employment would be debarred from voting at parliamentary elections. It was the duty of the returning officers to send the ballot papers to all persons at the address given on this list. The ballot paper, marked by the absent voter and accompanied by the proper declaration of identity, would be counted by the returning officer, if received before the close of the polls. On investigation the Government discovered, as announced by Sir. G. Cave, that because of the limited time between the canvassing and polling day only about twenty per cent of the soldiers abroad would be able to receive their ballots and return them before the close of the polls.<sup>3</sup> When the question came up again on the report stage, the Government proposed two schemes in order to meet the difficulties. The first, which was adopted, provided that in order to allow for greater time for receiving the ballots from the absent voters the count of the ballots could, by Order in Council, be postponed for eight days after the close of the poll.<sup>4</sup> All ballots received up to the day on which the ballots were counted were to be included. There being a strong objec-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> It was the duty of the registration officer to place all naval and military absent voters on the absent voters list without them making claim. All other voters had to make claim to be placed on this list.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 97: 1193-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 98: 953-5.

tion to postponing the announcement of the results of an election for eight days, an amendment was adopted which limited this provision to the duration of the war and twelve months thereafter.

The second proposal for dealing with the absent voters was the system of voting by proxy. The provision as introduced was limited in its duration to twelve months after the end of the war and was to be brought in force by Order in Council. It was to apply only to absent registered electors who were soldiers, sailors, merchant seamen, pilots or fishermen who were at sea or serving abroad at such a great distance that it would be impossible for them to return their votes by post in time to have them counted even with the extended period. Under such conditions they were entitled to appoint a proxy and vote by proxy at a parliamentary election. If they had chosen to vote by proxy no absent voter's ballot was to be sent to them. An attempt was immediately made by Mr. Peto to remove the limitation upon its duration and make it a permanent part of the electoral system.<sup>1</sup> So vigorous was the protest against any limitation that the Government consented to make concessions and the limitation was stricken out without a vote.

The bill provided that the proxy paper was to be issued by the registration officer and the proxy named thereon either by the elector directly or by his authorization. Twelve months after the termination of the war the proxy papers would have to be renewed every six months. After proxy papers were issued to an elector, unless they were properly cancelled, he could not vote in any other manner during their continuance. Persons entitled to be appointed as proxies were the wife, husband, parent, brother, sister of the elector, or a parliamentary elector from the constituency, or one of the constituencies, in which the elector was

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 98: 978-80.



registered. A voter could not appoint more than one person as his proxy in the same constituency and in no case could he appoint proxies for more than two constituencies nor could one person act as proxy for more than two electors unless the proxy were husband, wife, parent or sister of the absent voter. Penalties were attached for the illegal exercise of this right.

### *Deposit by Candidates at Parliamentary Elections*

The bill provided that a candidate for parliamentary election must desposit the sum of £150 with the returning officer. It further provided that if a candidate did not poll one-eighth of the total number of votes cast or in case of a constituency having more than two candidates, one-eighth of the number of votes polled divided by the number of members to be elected, the sum deposited by him would be forfeited to the government. Otherwise it was returned to the candidate. An amendment was accepted which provided that in case of a general election where a candidate was nominated in more than one constituency he could not recover his deposit in more than one of these constituencies. There was no objection to this clause which was for the purpose of preventing freak candidates being nominated in several comstituencies.

### *Returning Officers*

The bill provided that the sheriff should be the returning officer for the county, and the mayor of the borough or the chairman of the council the returning officer for the borough, in case the parliamentary boroughs were coterminous with the municipal borough.<sup>1</sup> The clause in effect retained the system which had been in vogue since 1832. Several attempts were made to retain for the newly created

<sup>1</sup> This does not apply to university constituencies.

parliamentary constituencies the same returning officers who had served under the old system in order to preserve the historic continuity. But the Home Secretary refused to make exceptions for reasons of historical significance and the section was adopted without material alteration. A later section provided that the real duties of the returning officers should be performed by the registration officer as acting returning officer.

The bill provided that all legitimate expenses of the returning officer should be paid by the Treasury out of money provided by Parliament. This was safeguarded by fixing a scale of maximum expenses with the additional power of reviewing and reducing all expense charges. Points of controversy could be appealed to the court for final settlement. After minor objections the clause was adopted.

### *Election Expenses*

The scale of election expenses permitted to candidates by the bill greatly reduced the costs of elections as allowed under the Corrupt and Illegal Practice Prevention Act of 1883. The schedule limited the amount to be expended in the counties to seven pence for each elector on the register and in the boroughs to five pence for each elector on the register. Although the electorate was to be doubled by the bill yet the actual amount of expense to the candidate would be considerably less than formerly. It was estimated that in the county with 20,000 electors, under the new provisions, the amount allowed for expenditures would be £583 6s. 8d. while under the old law it would have amounted to £1,790. In a borough of 20,000 electors the expense would be £416 13s. 4d. as compared with £920 under the old schedule.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this the candidate was allowed, for his personal expense, £100, but if this amount were

<sup>1</sup> Seager, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

exceeded the candidate had to supply a detailed account of the excess to his agent and include it in his return. This amount did not include the election agent's fee provided it did not exceed £75 for county or £50 for borough elections. In committee under the discussion of the schedule an attempt was made to increase this fee but it failed. Attempts were also made to exclude the salary of the election agents from the election expenses but the Government refused to grant such concessions.

The bill also provided that each duly nominated candidate for a parliamentary election was entitled to send, free of any charge for postage, to each registered elector of the constituency one postal communication not exceeding one ounce in weight. This was limited in the committee to material relating to the election only and the maximum amount permitted was increased to two ounces. It was estimated that in a constituency of 20,000 electors this would be a saving of £46 13s. to the candidate. During the committee stage an amendment was made which gave candidates the right to use school houses during proper hours provided they paid the necessary costs incurred by the school authorities and any damages that might result from such meetings. This legalized a practice which had hitherto been permitted to certain candidates at the discretion of the managers.

Another section attempted to restrict the expenses by unauthorized persons on behalf of a candidate. It provided that no expense could be incurred by any person, except the candidate's authorized agent, on account of holding public meetings, or issuing advertisements, circulars or publications for the purpose of promoting the election of any candidate at a parliamentary election unless this were authorized in writing by the agent and the expenses were duly returned as a part of the candidate's expenses. There

was no opposition to the general principle and with minor changes the section was adopted.

*Application of the Bill to Ireland*

The Speaker's Conference had recommended that the franchise reform should apply to Ireland but it had made no recommendation in regard to the inclusion of Ireland in a scheme of redistribution. The Government in framing the bill had included Ireland in the franchise reform but had excluded it from redistribution. On October 17, Sir J. Lonsdale introduced an amendment which provided that the redistribution of seats apply to Ireland as well as to Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> This led to a general discussion of Ireland in relation to the bill. The question of the redistribution of the number of seats between Great Britain and Ireland was not introduced but only the redistribution of the seats in Ireland. Sir J. Lonsdale stated that there were gross inequalities between the various constituencies in Ireland and these would be greatly increased by the extension of the franchise. He claimed that Ulster should have at least three more members on any fair basis of representation.

In stating the policy of the Government Sir G. Cave said that it had followed the recommendations of the Conference and had included Ireland in the franchise reform but had left the question of redistribution for the House to decide. He recognized the injustice of extending the franchise in Ireland and at the same time perpetuating the existing inequalities of representation, and he suggested that the Committee could direct the Government to appoint an Irish commission to deal with the Irish problem. They could make their report in time to have the schedule included

<sup>1</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 98: 95.



in the bill.<sup>1</sup> If this were not done the only alternative was to exclude Ireland from the bill. This called forth a vigorous speech from Mr. Dillon who said that any attempt to include Ireland within the provisions of redistribution would introduce the whole Irish controversy upon the floor of the House. This would only accentuate the difficulties between the various sections of Ireland because it would mean that some parts would gain representation at the expense of other sections. He also maintained that this would be a distinct breach of faith with Ireland and a departure from the Speaker's recommendations.

The Government was in a very difficult position in regard to the Irish situation. The Home Rule Bill which provided for the reduction of the representation of Ireland from 103 to 42 members had not come into operation and it looked as though it would not because of the opposition from Ulster. If redistribution were applied to Ireland on the basis of her old representation, it would make one representative for every 40,000 or 50,000 people while in Great Britain it was on a basis of one representative for 70,000. It would also make it appear that there was a finality about the existing status and that the Government did not propose to act. To complicate the situation further a convention was in session at the time which it was hoped would offer a solution for the whole Irish question and it was felt that it was inadvisable to hamper their deliberations in any way. In view of these facts and the rather strong feeling exhibited by both sides the Government declined to make any decision on the Irish question but promised to permit the question to be raised at a later stage of the bill.

The next day when the clause relating to the application of the bill to Ireland was introduced Sir J. Lonsdale moved

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 98: 103-6.

another amendment which entirely excluded Ireland from the scope of the bill.<sup>1</sup> His object was not really to exclude Ireland from the bill but to get it included in redistribution. The Government insisted upon the defeat of this amendment and announced that it would include Ireland within the scope of redistribution. Mr. O'Brien characterized the policy of the Government as downright treachery and Mr. Dillon again warned the Government that this would stir up the whole controversy in Ireland which the Nationalists were attempting to settle by constitutional means. The amendment was defeated.<sup>2</sup> The clause as adopted provided that there would be but one register a year instead of two as in England. Certain alternations were made in the machinery of the bill so that it would suit the local administration of the act to Ireland.

### *Application of the Bill to Scotland*

An important question was raised when the section which dealt with the application of the act to Scotland was under consideration. The Speaker's Conference made no recommendations in regard to the local franchise of Scotland. In the bill as presented by the Government no exception was made and the local government franchise applied to Scotland as well as to England. This was strenuously objected to by Scotland because the policy of Scotland had always been more liberal in regard to the local franchise than was the case in England. In order to deal with this problem the Government introduced amendments which preserved for Scotland the local government franchise practically as it had been. This led to another difficulty in connection with women's suffrage. Since the parliamentary franchise for

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 98: 298-301.

<sup>2</sup> For later development of controversy, *cf. infra*, p. 185.

women was based upon the local government franchise, the basis of women's suffrage in Scotland would be much broader than in England. In order to meet this situation an amendment was adopted which provided that in Scotland a woman could vote in local elections on the same basis as though she were a man but she could exercise the parliamentary franchise only on like conditions as in England. Minor modifications were made to suit the administration of the act to local conditions in Scotland such as making the registration officer the assessor and the returning officer the sheriff.

### *Redistribution*

The question of redistribution was thoroughly considered by the Speaker's Conference. It was recognized by all that redistribution must accompany any electoral reform. In order to facilitate this work the Government on May 14, 1917, appointed a Boundary Commission which was to complete its work by the time the committee stage of the bill was reached. The Instructions issued to the Commission by the Government provided that the number in the House of Commons remain substantially the same. The standard unit of population for each member was 70,000. This could be departed from under certain conditions. A county or borough with a population of between 50,000 and 70,000 was permitted to have separate representation. A county or borough which had two members was not to lose a member if the defect in population was not more than 20,000. The City of London was granted some concessions and was allowed to have two members. These Instructions were debated by the House on June 11 and were only slightly modified.<sup>1</sup> An attempt was made by the agricultural interests to get an amendment adopted which would

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 94: 635-95.

require that attention be paid to areas as well as to population in the readjustment of boundary lines so that the agricultural districts would not suffer from redistribution. The Government refused to grant any concession on this point. On recommendation of the Government, however, some concessions were granted and some latitude was given the Commission to depart from the Instructions where it seemed advisable. They were also to have regard to the electorate rather than to population wherever they thought the electorate was abnormally large.

The Commission made their report on September 27, and it was embodied in the schedule. It provided for a total increase of thirty-four seats in the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> There was some criticism of this increase but the Government pointed out that this was due largely to the attempt to follow out the changes in Instructions made by the House. In connection with the redistribution of London, minor amendments were accepted concerning boundary limits, but no changes were made in connection with the number of members, in spite of vigorous efforts to secure an increase of four members which London claimed to be entitled to on the basis of population. The Government even turned a deaf ear to the sentimental and historical appeal which came from York to be permitted to retain its two members because for six centuries it had been entitled to two representatives in the House. The only concession granted was to the University of London which was permitted to retain its one member instead of being grouped with the eight other universities in England and Wales in a scheme of proportional representation. Otherwise the House adhered rigidly to the recommendations of the

<sup>1</sup>The Lords made an amendment which was later accepted by the House which granted one representative to the University of Wales. *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 27: 1136.



Commission, no additional members were provided for and only minor amendments accepted such as the change of the name of constituencies to satisfy local desires.

In England, London received an increase of three members making sixty-two in all, the other boroughs were given an increase of twenty-seven, and the universities an increase of two members while the counties lost one member. In Wales the boroughs lost one member, the counties gained two and the university one. In Scotland the boroughs gained two, the universities one and the counties lost one member. It was the boroughs, the great industrial centers, which gained a total of thirty-three seats by the redistribution. Seventeen large boroughs got increased representation; that of Birmingham was increased from five to twelve members, Liverpool from two to eleven, Manchester from four to ten, Sheffield from two to seven, Leeds from one to six, Bristol from one to five, Bradford from one to four, Hull from one to four, and Nottingham from one to four members. On the other hand there were twenty-seven boroughs, most of them with a parliamentary history of centuries, which were extinguished. Among these were Boston, Canterbury, Colchester, Peterborough, Scarborough, Shrewsbury, Warwick and Windsor. In general the redistribution marked a decline in the representation of the agricultural districts and an increase in the political power of the large towns. Six well defined areas—Greater London with 101 members, Lancashire with 66, the West Riding of Yorkshire with 43, the Birmingham zone with 41, the Glasgow zone with 32, and the North-East Coast with 31—will return 314 members or 37 more than the rest of Great Britain. The west of England was proportionately the greatest loser; and Cornwall, so prolific in boroughs before the Reform Act of 1832, was deprived of its solitary survivor, Penryn and Falmouth.

The counties lost a total of eleven members and there was a widespread readjustment of boundary lines.<sup>1</sup>

### *Proportional Representation*

The fact that the redistribution of seats had deprived so many county and country districts of their representation in the House caused the agricultural interests especially to carry on a vigorous propaganda to get proportional representation reintroduced into the bill.<sup>2</sup> The question came up again on the report stage when Mr. A. Williams introduced an amendment that virtually would have restored the original clause in the bill.<sup>3</sup> It was not proposed to apply this to the country as a whole but only to a limited number of cities and to twenty-nine divisions of London. The supporters especially emphasized the fact that unless proportional representation were reintroduced the number of dual voters would be enormously increased and that it was necessary to secure representation for minorities. The London Liberal Federation was practically unanimous against the application of the scheme to London. It was pointed out by the opponents of the plan that with one exception all those who had spoken in support of the proposal represented constituencies which would not be affected by the amendment and that they were attempting to impose the experiment upon some other constituency. While the Government left it an open question, Mr. Hayes Fisher warned the House that if proportional representation were reintroduced it would cause serious delay with the bill because it would mean a reconstitution of the Boundary Commission.<sup>4</sup> On division the principle was defeated for

<sup>1</sup>For general summary, cf. *infra*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *supra*, pp. 154, 162.

<sup>3</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 99: 1302-12.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 1457-64.

the third time by a vote of 126 ayes to 202 noes, a much more decisive defeat than on the two previous occasions.<sup>1</sup>

### *Alternative Voting*

After the defeat of proportional representation the discussion of alternative voting was again brought before the House by a motion introduced by Sir G. Young which proposed to strike out the clause providing for alternative voting.<sup>2</sup> This led to a three-hour debate. The Government again left it an open question and on division the principle was sustained by a vote of 150 to 121.<sup>3</sup> An amendment was then adopted which altered the method of counting the alternative vote. The proposed plan as set forth in a new schedule, was known as the Nanson plan, which had been in operation in West Australia. Two days later, November 28, this proposed schedule was introduced.<sup>4</sup> After considerable discussion, on second reading, so much opposition developed against this method of counting the votes that it failed to be adopted by vote of 135 ayes to 167

<sup>1</sup> Analysis of the vote shows that the Labor party, Nationalist, and Independent gave a majority for the amendment while the Liberals gave a small majority against it, and the Unionists rolled up a big majority in the opposition.

	<i>Against</i>	<i>For</i>
Unionist .....	126	28
Liberal .....	70	60
Labor .....	8	13
Nationalist .....		26
Independent .....		1
	<hr/> 204	<hr/> 128

This includes the Tellers. *The Times*, November 24, 1917, p. 8. For later stages in the House of Lords, *cf. infra*, p. 188.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 99: 1469-73.

<sup>2</sup> For action of Lords, *cf. infra*, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 99: 2125-38.

noes. After this party manoeuvre to defeat the principle of alternative voting it was left in a peculiar position. There had been incorporated in the bill references to the eighth and ninth schedules as a method of counting the alternative votes, but no such schedules were in existence, so obnoxious had the proposed scheme been to the Liberal members. Since they could not agree upon the method of counting the vote it was left to an Order in Council to develop a plan of procedure.

### *Disqualification of Conscientious Objectors*

The question of the disfranchisement of conscientious objectors was again raised by Sir G. Young in report stage.<sup>1</sup> He introduced an amendment which provided that, "Any person who has been exempted from military service on the grounds of conscientious objections or who having joined the forces, has been sentenced by court-martial for refusal to obey orders, and who alleged conscientious objections to military service as a reason for his refusal, shall be disqualified from being registered or voting at a parliamentary or local government election."<sup>2</sup> The question had aroused a great deal of discussion outside of the House, and the members had been deluged with letters and telegrams on both sides of the question. By this time the Government had taken a different position on the question and agreed to leave it open. Among the supporters of the general proposition there was a consensus of opinion that the amendment was too broad in scope and rather loosely constructed. It would apply to members of the Society of Friends, even though after being exempt from military service, they had rendered valuable service to the nation as members of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 99: 1135-8.



Friends Ambulance Unit in France and Italy and as mine sweepers. It was generally agreed that they should not be disfranchised. On the other hand the amendment did not reach those objectors who had not been sentenced by court-martial but had been dealt with under other offenses. On account of these criticisms, at the suggestion of the Government, the vote was taken on the principle and the Government promised to embody the suggestions in an amendment. With this understanding the amendment carried by a vote of 209 ayes to 171 noes.<sup>1</sup>

The amendments to this clause were taken up on December 6. The first one excluded from disqualification all those who had taken up work with non-combatant battalions.<sup>2</sup> As passed by the House the clause was of unlimited duration. This gave rise to a great deal of opposition and it was finally amended so as to terminate five years after the end of the war. The scope of the clause was also greatly limited by the provision that the disqualification should not apply to a person who within one year after the termination of the war proved to the Central Tribunal,<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the results shows almost a straight party vote upon the question, the Unionists being responsible for its passage.

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Unionist .....	178	5
Liberal .....	28	133
Labor .....	1	21
National .....	2	14
Independent .....	2	
	<hr/> 211	<hr/> 173

This includes the Tellers. *The Times*, Nov. 23, 1917, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 100: 677-9.

<sup>3</sup> The Central Tribunal was established under the Military Service Act of 1916 (5 & 6 Geo. 5, c. 104), s. 7, and was to be continued for one year after the termination of the war for the purposes of this section of the Franchise Law.

obtained a certificate to that effect, that he performed service during the war as a member of any naval or military force for which money was provided by Parliament, or service afloat or abroad in connection with the war in any work of the British Red Cross, or the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England, or any other organization with a similar object. An attempt was made to strike out this last provision which was understood to include the Friends Ambulance Unit and similar organizations, but it failed. A further amendment was added which provided that any one having been exempted from military service on condition of doing work of national importance, and having done such work to the satisfaction of the Tribunal, would be exempt from disqualification. In the House of Lords this was further amended to include those who had been granted an absolute exemption from military service but who had nevertheless entered upon and continued to perform service which was of national importance.<sup>1</sup> It was further provided that this disqualification should not operate so as to disqualify the wife of a man who was disfranchised. In the report stage in the Lords the clause was redrafted but no change was made in its meaning or application.

As finally adopted the disqualification was limited to five years after the end of the war. It was to apply to all persons who were exempted from military services on account of conscientious objections or those who were sentenced by court-martial for refusal to obey military law, on account of conscientious objection. Conscientious objectors, however, were not to be disqualified if before the expiration of one year after the war they obtained a certificate from the Central Tribunal that they had satisfactorily performed services during the war in some way connected

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 27: 762.

with the war or had performed work of national importance. This provision greatly limited the extent of the disqualification.

### *Redistribution in Ireland*

On October 18, the Government announced its definite intentions of including Ireland within the scope of redistribution.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime a Boundary Commission had been appointed and had prepared a schedule. On December 4, a new section and schedule dealing with redistribution in Ireland were introduced. Mr. John Redmond, speaking for the Nationalists, immediately moved the rejection of this part of the amendment.<sup>2</sup> He accused the Government of a breach of faith with Ireland as the Nationalists had accepted the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference on the understanding that redistribution would not apply to Ireland. He said the fact that the Government had decided to force redistribution into the bill meant it had no hope that the Irish Convention would come to any agreement or settlement. This gave rise to a long and rather bitter discussion of the Irish question. The Nationalists insisted that the Government was bent upon the humiliation of Ireland, that the Boundary Commission's report would deprive the Nationalists of their power, that this policy would only increase the strength of the revolutionary party (Sinn Fein), and that the whole policy of the Government had been directed by Sir Edward Carson in the interests of the Unionists.

The Government defending its policy said the delay in bringing forward this scheme was due to the hope that the Irish Convention would have been able, long before

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 100: 316-9.

this stage of the bill, to bring forward a solution of the whole question. In the absence of this report the Government had either to exclude Ireland entirely from the scope of the bill or include it within redistribution. With the pressure of the whips the policy of the Government, in spite of the strong protest of the Nationalists, was sustained by a vote of 217 to 163.

After being defeated in regard to redistribution the next move of the Nationalists was to attempt to get the principle of proportional representation applied to Ireland. In introducing this amendment Mr. Devlin argued that unless this system were adopted minorities would be almost wholly unrepresented in the different parts of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The Government refused to leave this an open question and the amendment failed. In spite of the fact that the Government carried through its policy and defeated all attempts at amendment, the attack of the Nationalists continued in an ever increasing and threatening manner. It was evident that the Government was getting involved in such a controversial question that a general agreement on the bill might become impossible.

When the second reading of this new section and schedule was moved on December 6, Mr. Healy immediately launched a vituperative attack against the policy of the Government in connection with redistribution and the methods that had been followed in the appointment of the Boundary Commission and its work.<sup>2</sup> He was bitter and criminating in his attack upon Trinity College and its representative, Sir Edward Carson. This caused a violent debate which threatened to wreck the passage of the bill. At the end of this hopeless wrangle Mr. J. Redmond

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 100: 499-500.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 758-65.



proposed a compromise which offered the Government a way of escape from a very serious situation. This was accepted in principle by Mr. Bonar Law and the next day it was definitely agreed that a Conference should be set up to consider redistribution of seats in Ireland. It was to be composed of two members to be nominated by Mr. Redmond, leader of the Nationalists, and two by Sir J. Lonsdale, leader of the Irish Unionists, and the Speaker who should serve as chairman.<sup>1</sup> It was understood that all parts of the country would have equitable distribution having regard to population. The decision of the Conference was to be embodied in a bill, which<sup>2</sup> was to pass as an agreed measure, and was to receive the Royal assent at the same time as the Franchise Bill. On these conditions the section and schedule in the bill dealing with Ireland were withdrawn. This proved to be a happy solution of a highly contentious problem which threatened to break up the agreement on the bill and greatly endangered its final passage. With this out of the way the Franchise Bill, amid general cheers, passed a third reading without even a division.

### *The Bill in the House of Lords*

The bill was introduced in the House of Lords for a first reading on December 11, and came up for a second reading on December 17.<sup>3</sup> The debate which lasted for three days was of an unusual character, in that no member moved the rejection of the bill nor did any member commit himself to vote against the bill even though no changes were made in it. The chief objections urged against it were that it was inopportune to introduce such a measure during the

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 100: 820.

<sup>2</sup> *Cf. infra*, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 27: 86-102; 163.

war, that proportional representation had been stricken out of the bill, that it included women's suffrage, that the provisions for the redistribution of Ireland were not settled, and that it broke a political truce.

*Women's Suffrage in the House of Lords*

In the committee stage only minor amendments were made in the first three clauses and no really contentious question was taken up until that of women's suffrage was reached. The debate on this lasted for two days although no new argument was presented. There was a great deal of anxiety among the supporters of the principle even though it was evident that the clause would not be stricken from the bill. It was recognized that this would cause a struggle between the two Houses which the Lords did not care to embark upon during war times. On division the amendment to defeat the women's suffrage provision failed by a vote of 134 to 71.<sup>1</sup>

Attempts were made by the Lords to reintroduce the clause which disqualified wives of local government electors from being registered in respect of the same property for the local government franchise<sup>2</sup> and also to strike out the clause which disqualified conscientious objectors,<sup>3</sup> but both of these attempts failed by large majorities.

*Proportional Representation and Alternative Voting in the House of Lords*

Since the defeat of proportional representation in the Commons the supporters of the principle had conducted a vigorous campaign to get it reintroduced into the bill by the Lords.<sup>4</sup> The agricultural interests were especially active

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 5th series, vol. 27: 526.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 634.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 724.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf. supra*, p. 180.

in this movement. Resolutions demanding that proportional representation be applied to the country areas were passed by the English and Scottish Chambers of Agriculture and the English and Scottish Farmers' Union.<sup>1</sup> The recommendation of the Speaker's Conference had been that proportional representation be applied to parliamentary boroughs having three or more members. The last amendment which was defeated by the House applied only to a limited number of borough constituencies and to 29 divisions in London. The amendment introduced in the House of Lords by the Earl of Selbourne provided that proportional representation would apply to both borough and county parliamentary constituencies returning from three to five members in any contested election of the full number of members.<sup>2</sup> In the two days' debate which followed no new arguments were presented on either side of the question. The Government warned the advocates of the principle that its introduction into the bill might endanger the passage of the measure, but this did not deter the advocates from rolling up a big majority in favor of the amendment on division, the vote being 131 to 42.<sup>3</sup> In the House, on an amendment of limited application, the Unionists had voted by almost a hundred majority to reject proportional representation, but the Lords now gave an overwhelming majority for unlimited application of the principle to multiple member districts. There were grave suspicions that the votes were not being cast wholly upon the specific issue involved.

It became evident when a motion was immediately made to eliminate the system of alternative voting from the bill that these suspicions were plausible. This was the one question, in connection with the bill, which had been decided

<sup>1</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, Nov. 8, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 27: 824.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 954.

each time by a strict party vote. While it had been carried by a small majority, there had been a solid vote of the Unionists against the principle. They thoroughly appreciated the disadvantage at which they would be placed in a three-cornered fight, knowing they would lose many seats they had heretofore been able to secure. They were more strongly opposed to alternative voting than to proportional representation. On division the motion to eliminate alternative voting from the bill carried by a vote of 57 to 9.<sup>1</sup> With proportional representation reintroduced in the bill and alternative voting stricken out, the Lords hoped to get a favorable compromise on the question with the House.

The next amendment to be adopted was one which provided that the principle of proportional representation should be applied to university constituencies where there were three or more members to be elected rather than two members. This carried by a bare majority of one, the vote being 31 to 30.

#### *Division of Constituencies into Polling Districts*

A new section was adopted by the Lords which made provision for the division of constituencies into polling districts and the fixing of polling places.<sup>2</sup> Previously the division of the parliamentary boroughs into polling districts had been made by the town council. In other boroughs it had been made by the justices in petty sessions or by the county council. The new section placed the duty of dividing the constituencies into polling districts and the appointment of polling places upon the council by which the registration officer was appointed. Reasonable facilities for voting for all electors were required to be provided. In London it was provided that the draft of the plan should be sent to

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 27 : 974.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1002.



the London County Council for approval, elsewhere it was to be sent to the Local Government Board. It was further provided that any local authority or even thirty electors might ask the Local Government Board for a review of the decision of the council. The Board was authorized to make such recommendations to the council as seemed advisable. If these were not accepted by the council, the Board was authorized to make these alterations and enforce them. A further section provided that the place of election for each constituency (except university constituencies) would be fixed by the returning officer.

*Special Provision for Registration of Freeman*

On the report stage an amendment was adopted which preserved the ancient freeman vote. An attempt had been made in the House to introduce an amendment to this effect but the Government refused to make any concession. The amendment as accepted did not create a wholly new qualification for the franchise; it simply provided that a freeman of the City of London, being a liveryman of one of the several companies, who was qualified to vote as a parliamentary elector in respect of business premises could, if he desired, vote instead as a liveryman.<sup>1</sup> This simply granted the privilege to vote as a liveryman rather than as an occupier, but the freeman must first possess the occupier's qualifications. This same privilege was extended to other boroughs if the council of the borough so desired.

The chief interest in the Lords centered around women's suffrage, proportional representation, and alternative voting. These were the only questions concerning which there was any great disagreement or party spirit manifested. There were a large number of amendments offered. Those

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 5th series, vol. 27 : 1233-6.

that passed covered forty-six pages, not including the redistribution schedule. Most of these dealt with the drafting of the bill or were concerned with minor points of administration and did not change the principles of the bill as passed by the House. No determined opposition developed against the bill. In fact, no division was taken by the Lords on the first, second or third reading.

*Struggle between the Lords and Commons over Proportional Representation and Alternative Voting*

The amendments proposed by the Lords were taken up in the House on January 30. The first to be considered was that which provided for proportional representation; its rejection was moved by Mr. Burdett-Coutts.<sup>1</sup> The members of the House objected to having any electoral reform forced by the Lords. A great many members feared that the constituencies which they had so carefully nursed might be merged into larger constituencies which would make their electioneering tasks more difficult. There were also those who feared that the reintroduction of proportional representation so late in the stages of the bill might endanger its passage. The problem was more complicated by the new schedule which was to be revised by the Boundary Commission at the next session. This plan of legislating in the dark upon such an important question as redistribution did not appeal to the members very strongly and was one of the objections repeatedly urged during the debate. On division the House rejected the Lord's amendment by vote of 223 to 113.<sup>2</sup>

They next took up the amendment of the Lords which proposed to strike the principle of alternative voting from the bill. The last time it was before the House it passed by

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 101: 1602-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1704.

a strictly partisan vote of 150 to 121.<sup>1</sup> Although the Government proposed to leave it an open question, Sir G. Cave, speaking for himself, strongly urged the House to accept the amendment of the Lords for fear its rejection would endanger the success of the bill. This warning and the fear of endangering the success of the bill caused a close vote on division, the amendment being defeated by a vote of 178 to 170.<sup>2</sup> This made a rather dangerous deadlock between the two Houses, the Commons having defeated both of the important amendments proposed by the Lords.

The House referred the proportional representation amendment back to the Lords with the statement that they refused to accept it because they considered it undesirable to apply the principle of proportional representation especially in view of the delay in the passage of the bill which would be caused thereby. As soon as the question was before the Lords again the Earl of Selbourne introduced a substitute amendment which provided that any parliamentary borough entitled to return three or more members should be a single member constituency and in case of a contested election for the full number of members for Parliament the election should be according to the principle of proportional representation and that each elector should have one transferable vote. It provided that no constituency should have more than five members.<sup>3</sup> This would apply to 141 seats, 29 of which would be from London. This rather curious compromise throws some light upon the real purpose of the leaders in the Lords. The chief argument advanced by the Lords in favor of proportional re-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 101: 1820.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 28: 321-30.

presentation was that the agricultural districts might be represented, but the compromise which they now proposed entirely excluded the county constituencies from the scope of the amendment. During the debate it was suggested by Earl Curzon that it would be much more equitable and less contentious with the House of Commons if a Commission were appointed with instructions to draw up a scheme of proportional representation that would apply to 100 members, these to exclude London and include the agricultural districts. The suggestion was not accepted at the time, and the substitute amendment was carried by a vote of 86 to 35. The Lords thus took an uncompromising position in the hope of being able to get concessions from the Commons.

On the question of alternative voting the Commons simply stated that they refused to accept the Lords' amendment because they desired to adhere to the principle of the alternative vote. The motion was immediately made that the Lords insist upon their amendment.<sup>1</sup> This was the one provision which the Lords were determined to have stricken from the bill. They took advantage of the weak position taken by the Government in the House in regard to the question and cited that the Commons had sustained the principle at one time by a majority of only one vote and had rejected the Lord's amendment by a majority of only eight votes. They argued that this indicated no decided opinion on the matter, while the Lords had rejected the principle by a majority of six to one. This argument prevailed and the Lords again took a chance upon attempting to coerce the Commons and insisted upon their amendment by a vote of 66 to 29. This action offered a possibility for a compromise by dropping both proportional representation and alternative voting from the bill.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 28: 351.



When the House took up the Lords' proportional representation amendment, which applied only to boroughs, amendments were introduced which would exclude the administrative county of London from the scope of proportional representation. This was followed by other amendments to exclude the cities of Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool. It became apparent that this was only an attempt to defeat the amendment by the exclusion of various cities from its scope, so that Sir G. Cave requested that the vote be taken upon the main issue. This was accordingly done and the Lords' amendment was for the second time rejected by a vote of 238 to 141.<sup>1</sup> Thus for the fifth time the House voted against the principle of proportional representation.

The House next took up the alternative voting amendment. Mr. Dickinson immediately introduced what he claimed was a compromise which provided that the alternative vote should be used in an election for one member of Parliament in any parliamentary borough where there were more than two candidates.<sup>2</sup> This followed the line of the compromise proposed by the Lords in connection with proportional representation and limited the application of the principle to the boroughs. It was urged that this would afford an opportunity to experiment with the principle and yet not make too wide an application of it at first. This was carried by a bare majority of one, the vote being 195 to 194. For a second time the Commons rejected the Lords' alternative voting amendment. A number of Liberals abstained from voting for fear of jeopardizing the bill and most of the Liberal and Labor members of the Ministry did likewise.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 101: 2170-86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2193-4.

The deadlock between the two Houses continued to February 6, the very last day of the session. With the decisive vote of the Commons on proportional representation and only a majority of one for alternative voting it appeared that both schemes would be dropped from the bill, which would really satisfy the Lords. But the Lords made one more attempt to save proportional representation. Acting upon the suggestion made by Earl Curzon when the question was before the Lords on the former occasion, Lord Lansdowne made a proposition for a compromise.<sup>1</sup> He proposed that a Commission be appointed to prepare a scheme under which 100 members would be elected to the House at a general election by the principle of proportional representation. The Commission was to hold inquiries and to select the constituencies which were to return from three to seven members. It was provided that this would apply to both borough and county constituencies. The scheme was to be prepared and presented to Parliament and, if adopted by resolution by both Houses, it was to go into effect as though it were part of the Act. The Government agreed to carry out this plan and to afford facilities for its discussion when presented to Parliament. With this assurance there was very little doubt that the matter of proportional representation was settled. This compromise was accordingly accepted by the Lords.

After this agreement was reached, Lord Crewe proposed that the alternative vote be dealt with in the same manner. But the Lords were too sure of being able to defeat the alternative vote to grant any concessions. They refused to consider this proposal and rejected the modified form of alternative voting as proposed by the Commons by a vote of 74 to 33.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, 5th series, vol. 28: 400-24.

It was in the closing hours of the session that the amendments were sent back for the third time to the Commons. When the amendment to create the Commission to bring forward a scheme for proportional representation was introduced, Mr. Dickinson immediately introduced an amendment which provided that this same Commission also select 100 single member constituencies for the application of the principle of the alternative vote.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this was to apply exactly the same method of procedure to the alternative vote as to proportional representation. This appeared to be an equitable compromise. Sir G. Cave threw the weight of his influence against the proposal on the ground that it would so complicate the issue as seriously to endanger the success of the bill, and he appealed to the House to accept the proposal as received from the Lords without amendment. The principle of alternative voting was thus eliminated from the bill. The House then accepted the Commission scheme for proportional representation by a vote of 224 to 114. Immediately following the bill received the Royal assent, on February 6, 1918.

While it was emphatically denied by the Lords that there was any bargain concerning proportional representation and alternative voting, it was clearly evident that the fate of the two proposals was linked together. The Unionists' strategy resulted in the capitulation of the Commons. The Liberal and Labor parties were divided upon the question of proportional representation as were also the Unionists although possibly to a less extent. But on the question of the alternative vote it had been a clear party issue, the Labor and Liberal parties standing solidly for the principle and the Unionist against it. The Lords by inserting proportional representation were able to defeat the alternative vote and to save proportional representation. Because

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 101: 2270-84.

of the weak position taken by the Government, the question of the alternative vote was not referred to the Commission and the Lords thus scored a victory over the Commons.

### *Redistribution*

In the meantime the Boundary Commission for the Redistribution of Seats in Ireland, which had been agreed to on December 7, had proceeded with their work.<sup>1</sup> The results were embodied in a bill which was introduced in the House for a first reading on January 23.<sup>2</sup> It was part of the understanding that this was to be an agreed measure. It caused, therefore, little discussion. It went through all of its stages without a division and received the Royal assent at the same time as the Franchise Bill. This bill deprived the ancient boroughs of Galway, Kilkenny, and Newry, concerning which there had been so much criticism, of separate representation. To the surprise of most members of Parliament the Conference granted Ireland an increase of two representatives, these going to the Queen's University of Belfast and the National University of Ireland. While this was opposed by most of the members it was recognized that it was the only way in which a compromise could be reached, and the House acquiesced in the results.

The net results of redistribution by the two acts were that the boroughs were given a total representation, including London, of 320 members or an increase of 36. By this change 44 old boroughs were extinguished and 31 new ones created. The counties had a total of 372 members which was 5 less than under the old system. These changes were brought about chiefly in the boundaries of divisions. The Universities were now entitled to 15 representatives, an increase of 6; this included the younger universities.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Redistribution of Seats (Ireland) Bill*, 1918, Bill 125.



In the readjustment England was given 492 members, an increase of 31; Wales 36, an increase of 2; Scotland 74, an increase of 2; and Ireland 105, an increase of 2, making a total of 707 members of the House of Commons, a total increase of 37.

### *Proportional Representation Finally Defeated*

The Commission which was appointed to bring forward a scheme for proportional representation made its report and it was considered in the House of Commons on May 13, 1918. The scheme applied to 11 parliamentary boroughs and 6 parliamentary county constituencies, returning in all 99 members. But the House was no more favorably inclined toward the proposed scheme than it had been on former occasions and the report was rejected by a vote of 110 to 166.<sup>1</sup> This finally disposed of the question of proportional representation so far as the Franchise Act of 1918 was concerned.

### *Conclusion*

Because this bill was a compromise measure carried on in the midst of war, it engendered less party spirit than any great franchise reform bill ever enacted by Parliament. The struggle for women's suffrage, which had for so long a time agitated the public and which at the opening of the war had caused a condition of open rebellion against the Government, was virtually won before the bill was introduced. Its success was assured so that it hardly assumed a place of first-rate importance during the passage of the Act. The questions that were of greatest contention and that threatened to wreck the bill were those which had not been before the country and in which the public at the time took very little interest. The disfranchisement of

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 106: 114.

conscientious objectors was strictly a war issue. The application of the bill to Ireland, which came possibly nearer than any other one question to wrecking the bill, was not purely a franchise matter but only part of the perennial Irish problem. The questions of proportional representation and of alternative voting, which caused such dramatic scenes during the closing stages of the bill, had never been before the country nor did they arouse any great popular interest. They were the only issues which were decided upon a strictly partisan basis.

The Representation of the People Act of 1918 placed the franchise in Great Britain upon a democratic basis and virtually granted manhood suffrage. For the first time a great nation granted the franchise to women, and although it was not granted on equal terms with men, the principle was definitely established. The complicated maze of franchise laws was swept aside by this Act and the franchise system was reduced to a comparatively simple basis. The redistribution of seats remedied the great disparity between the constituencies in England, but it did not remove this disparity as between England and Ireland; only a settlement of the Irish question will be able to accomplish this. The failure to adopt some system of proportional representation or alternative voting will probably result in a continued agitation for these reforms.

The remarkable success attained by the Speaker's Conference in bringing forward an agreed measure upon such a highly contentious subject as the extension of the franchise system marks a great triumph for nonpartisan legislative methods. This may point the way for the settlement of other apparently insolvable partisan problems, although it is obvious that the exigencies of war were responsible in no small part for the harmony that prevailed.

## APPENDIX

### THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, DECEMBER, 1918

It is not within the scope of this study to discuss the operation of the Act of 1918. The official government reports of the election of December, 1918, are not yet available;<sup>1</sup> no attempt will be made, therefore, to analyze in detail the results of the election, but a few points in connection with the operation of the new law may be indicated so far as these can be determined from unofficial sources.

The first election under the Reform Act in December, 1918, was a very abnormal one. It was so overshadowed by the military victory of the allies and dominated by the appeal to patriotism and emotion that it throws very little light upon the real operation of the new franchise law under normal conditions. It is the usual parliamentary practice for an election to take place only at the expiration of the term of Parliament or upon an appeal to the country on some issue in which the Government had been defeated in Parliament. No such procedure was followed in 1918. Parliament had long outlived its original term, but it had been extended by general agreement between the parties in order to avoid an election during the war. With the military success of the allies during the autumn of 1918 the position of the Coalition Government was stronger than it had been at any time during its existence.

As early as July the supporters of the Government began to urge the necessity of an election.<sup>2</sup> The Coalition Government was not slow to recognize the strength of its position, and by the first of November it had definitely decided that an election

<sup>1</sup> January, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, July 18, 1918, p. 6.

would be held as soon as the development of the military situation would make it feasible. There was no demand for an immediate election by any of the parties nor by the public. In fact the action of the Government in thus throwing the country into the excitement of an election was vigorously denounced by the Labor party and by Mr. Asquith as leader of the Liberal party.

The Government took advantage of the termination of the war and the strength of its position to perpetuate its power, and the day after the signing of the armistice Mr. Lloyd George at a meeting of the Liberals sounded the keynote of the campaign. He said that the old Parliament was moribund, had served its day, and that it was necessary for those who went to the peace conference to have a mandate from the people.<sup>1</sup> Ostensibly the purpose of the election was for a mandate upon the principles of peace. But the Government never outlined a peace policy and during the first part of the campaign discussed mainly domestic issues. During the latter part of the campaign it degenerated into the triple slogan, "Hang the Kaiser," "Make Germany pay the costs of the war," and "Banish all enemy aliens from England." It was generally recognized that no man in England had done more to win the war than had Mr. Lloyd George, and in the intoxication of victory the election offered an opportunity for the people to show their appreciation of his services and to express their confidence in his Government. The results at the polls fully justified his strategy; there was an overwhelming victory for the forces of the Coalition.

While the appeal was made to the electorate for a mandate on the terms of peace, yet great pressure was brought to bear by the forces of the Coalition to eliminate candidates and secure as many uncontested seats as possible. They were successful in sixty-nine constituencies, in all there were one hundred and seven uncontested seats.<sup>2</sup> The forces backing

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, November 13, 1918, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times, Supplement*, December 9, 1918, p. viii.



the Government were referred to as the Coalition, but in fact it could scarcely be said that there was a Coalition. The Labor party officially withdrew from the support of the Coalition movement as did also the Asquith wing of the Liberal party, which was in possession of the official machinery and the funds of that party. Therefore the Coalition consisted of the forces of the Government backed by the Unionist party and individual Liberal and Labor members. That the Unionists really dominated the situation and largely profited by the election was clearly substantiated by the results.

Seldom has any political party ever won such a sweeping victory. Every minister who had to face election was returned, and in most cases by a large majority. The whole Liberal opposition went down to defeat before the landslide. Mr. Asquith, all his front bench lieutenants, his whips, and all the ex-ministers who followed his leadership were defeated.<sup>1</sup> The victory gave the Coalition a majority of 249 over all other parties. The Government would also in the main have the support of the Non-Coalition Unionists and part of the Non-Coalition Liberals. It also gave the Unionists a total of 357 members or a majority of 7 over all other parties. This was a gain of 75 seats as compared with the old House.

<sup>1</sup> The following gives the results of the election according to parties :

<i>Coalition</i>		<i>Non-Coalition</i>	
Unionist	334	Labor	63
Liberal	133	Unionist	23
National Democratic	} 478	Liberal	28
Party		Irish Union	25
Independent		Sinn Fein	73
		Irish National	7
		National Party	2
		Independent	4
		Independent Radical	1
		Socialist	1
		Cooperator	1
		Federation of Discharged	
		Soldiers and Sailors	1

*The Times*, January 4, 1919, p. 7.

The Labor party, while not gaining the number of seats they had anticipated, elected 63 members; being the second party in the House, they assumed the responsibilities of the Opposition front bench. This was a distinct victory for the Trade Union element in the party. All the candidates who had been classified in any way as "pacifists" were defeated. Only a remnant of 28 Non-Coalition Liberals was returned and they did not include a single leader of the party. The Irish Nationalist party was almost annihilated, only 7 members surviving, the victory in Ireland going to the radical Sinn Fein party with 73 members.

On the face of the returns it would appear that the new electorate had flocked to the Unionist party and was largely responsible for the landslide. There is no way of determining how the women voted; estimates are uncertain, for no complete canvass was made, and very few polling booths were picketed. The leaders of all parties agreed that the women did not change materially the results of the election but only contributed to swell the majorities of the Coalition candidates. Since there was no clear-cut issue in the campaign between liberalism and conservatism nor between the Liberal, Unionist, and Labor parties, no conclusions can be drawn as to the affiliation of the women with the old parties. They responded to the appeals to patriotism, as did the men, and in gratitude for the war services of the Government returned it to power.

During the struggle for women's suffrage one of the chief arguments which had been used against granting the franchise to women was that they would form separate political parties and since they were numerically in the majority would dominate elections. The first election under the Act showed no tendency in that direction. In the earlier debates on women's suffrage there had been great objections raised to opening membership in the House of Commons to women. During the debate on the Reform Bill this question was not discussed and nothing was stated in the law to indicate whether or not they were eligible to membership. In order that

this question might not be left to the courts to decide, before Parliament was dissolved for the election, a bill was rushed through which removed any possible disability. The way was thus cleared for women candidates. In all there were seventeen women candidates. Of these only one, Countess Markievicz, a Sinn Fein from Dublin, was successful. In only two cases was the election close. The women showed no disposition to support women candidates. There were 8,479,156 women electors on the register and the total vote cast for the 17 women candidates was only 57,978. As a result of the first election under women's suffrage the women were still unrepresented by one of their sex, since the Sinn Fein members refused to sit at Westminster. There was no indication during the election that the women would attempt to form separate political parties. Of the seventeen women candidates one represented the Unionist party, four the Liberal, four the Labor, two the Sinn Fein, five the Independent, and one, Miss Christabel Pankhurst, the Women's party. She had the active support of the Coalition; in fact, the Unionist candidate, Major S. M. Thompson, withdrew at the suggestion of Mr. Bonar Law and she was placed in nomination by Major Thompson.

A larger number of women were placed on the register by the Franchise Act than had been anticipated, the estimate having been 6,000,000. While there is no record of the number who voted, it was the consensus of opinion among the party leaders that they voted in fully as large a proportion as did the men. They took an active interest in the campaign and were especially active in heckling the political speakers.

A larger proportion of the population participated in this election than ever before in the history of the country. The census of 1911 gave the total population of the United Kingdom at 45,221,615. Under the operation of the Franchise Act of 1918, 21,392,322 were placed on the register as parliamentary electors, that is, 47 per cent of the total population.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1919, no. 138, p. 23.

The total vote cast for the 600 contested seats was 10,761,195,<sup>1</sup> practically 50 per cent of the electorate, and 24 per cent of the total population.

When the question of holding elections on a single day was before the House it was urged that it would place too great a burden upon the police to maintain order in all parts of the country. But even with a fourth of the population going to the polls no such difficulty was experienced. *The Times* characterized it as "the most orderly election of our time." The old street corner rowdyism, armies of hired canvassers, great numbers of imported speakers, highly colored motor cars, and carefully staged torchlight processions were things of the past. Part of this was due to the weakness of the opposition to the Coalition, part to the world situation under which the election was held, and it was also due in part to the limitations which were placed upon election expenditures of candidates.

The problem which forced the consideration of the franchise reform during the war was how to make it possible to place the soldiers and sailors on the register. This was one of the most difficult questions which Parliament had to work out. During the discussion any one who dared oppose any scheme which had this for its aim, no matter how impracticable it might be, was accused of being unpatriotic and of attempting to deprive the soldiers and sailors of their votes. The first trial of the scheme that was adopted can scarcely be taken as typical; it certainly did not come up to the expectation of those most interested. The circumstances surrounding the election were such as to make the full operation of the scheme impossible. The election was called on short notice before time was given for the completion and correction of the register. There were 3,900,135 military and naval voters on the register who were entitled to vote either as absent voters or by proxy.<sup>2</sup> But it was found that in a great many cases

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, January 4, 1919, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1919, no. 138, p. 23.



their addresses were incomplete or insufficient so that it was impossible to send ballot papers to them. According to the election instructions the army officers were required to furnish the registration officers, within three days after the notification of an election, a complete list of the latest addresses of all soldier voters who were residents within the officer's district. In the midst of the stirring military events of the closing days of the war and the rapid movement of the troops after the armistice the army officers were unable completely to carry out these instructions. Great difficulty was experienced in securing the military addresses of the absent voters. It was impossible for the Post Office Department to deliver mail on regular schedule to troops that were being sent rapidly into Germany or being returned to England, and to those on the more distant fronts. In order to give more time for the return of the ballots, the time between the closing of the polls and the counting of the ballots was extended to fourteen days. It appears that the soldiers themselves took very little interest in the election. Sir Auckland Geddes, Minister of National Service, reported that in spite of every effort to permit the soldiers and sailors to vote there was a great apathy among them, that few returned their forms, and that in some cases the forms were used to light fires.<sup>1</sup> The disinclination to use the proxy facilities extended to the officers also, many reporting that they did not care to vote.

The available statistics from a small number of constituencies indicate that only about 30 per cent of the absent voters actually voted. The *Manchester Guardian* estimated that less than one fifth of the total number of men on the absent voters list recorded their votes.<sup>2</sup> The major part of this vote came from men who were stationed in England or were home on leave of absence. Many ballots were returned marked with such inscriptions as, "The fraud of a hurried election," "Let us go home and then we will vote," "We will soon put

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, November 21, 1918, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, December 30, 1918, p. 8.

things straight when we come back," and "Demobilization first." In the case of the proxy voters on the more distant fronts only a very small per cent appointed proxies. So many abnormal elements entered into this election that it is too early to determine whether this new type of voting will justify the expectations of its promoters.

One of the arguments advanced against proportional representation was that it would increase the number of candidates; but even without this system of voting the number of candidates in this election was unusually large. For the first time three-cornered contests were the rule rather than the exception. For the 600 contested seats, there was a total of 1,518 candidates. The fact that the size of the electorate was more than doubled, that the distinctions between the old parties largely disappeared, that the old electoral boundaries were entirely changed, and that the women, the soldiers, and the sailors votes were quite incalculable, account in part at least, for this great increase in the number of candidates and political groups. The supporters of proportional representation saw in the results of the election increased argument for their cause in that the victory of the Coalition in number of seats was entirely out of proportion to the votes they received.

The conditions under which the first election was held were so abnormal that no dogmatic statements can be made as to the operation of the new system. Only future elections can reveal the permanent changes which will be brought about by this more democratic franchise law.

## VITA

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THE author of this dissertation was born July 1, 1886, at Dublin, Indiana. He was graduated from Fairmount Academy in 1905. He received the degree of A.B. from Earlham College in 1911 and the degree of A.M. from Columbia University in 1918. He was instructor in History at Penn College from 1911 to 1915. He was a lecturer on International Relations, under the auspices of the American Association for International Conciliation, at the University of South Carolina during the summer of 1916 and at Ohio Northern University during the summer of 1917. He was instructor in the department of History at Hunter College in 1917-1918. Since 1918 he has been professor of Economics and Political Science at Earlham College. He was a graduate student in the department of Public Law at Columbia University from 1915 to 1918. During the year 1916-1917 he was holder of a University Scholarship. He was particularly interested in the lectures given by Professors Seager, Seligman, Beard, and McBain. It is especially to the latter that he owes a debt of gratitude for the numerous and helpful suggestions made in the preparation of this dissertation.









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Gov't  
Title Parliamentary franchise reform in England M  
from 1885 to 1918.

DATE.	NAME OF BORROWER.
July 3/58	E. Wallace Wallace



